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Adventure

Arthur O. Friel
E. S. Pladwell
Max Bonter
Hugh Pendexter
Thomson Burtis
Kenneth Howell
R. T. M. Scott
B. J. Stolper
F. St. Mars
Ernest Bertelson

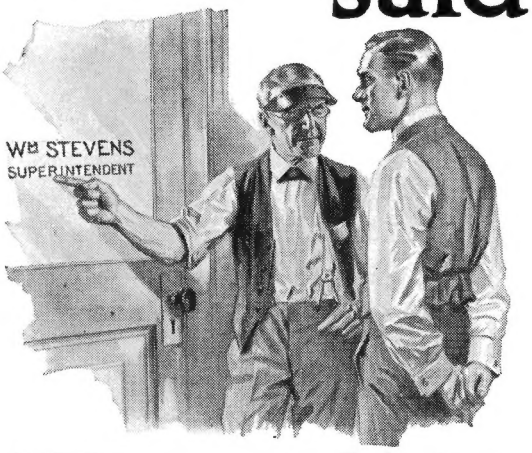
JULY 20th ISSUE, 1922
VOL. XXXV No. 5

ADVENTURE

25 Cents

What the Old Timer said to Charley

by C.L.Hardy



"ONLY a few years ago, Charley, the man whose name you see on that door was just where you are today.

"I remember the day he came to work for us. He didn't know much about the business. But he was always asking questions—always anxious to learn.

"And by and by we got to noticing that Billy Stevens was getting ahead of some of us old fellows who had been around here for years.

"I can remember as clearly as though it were yesterday, the day Billy showed old Tom Harvey how to figure out the pitch of some new bevel gears we were making on an important contract.

"Tom told me afterward how respectful Billy was—nothing fresh, or 'I know it all' about him. He just made a suggestion and showed Tom a quicker way to start the problem and a shorter, surer way to finish it.

"One day I said to him—'Where'd you get hep to all that fancy figuring, Bill?' We were eating lunch and he was reading some little book he always carried. He looked up at me and said innocently: 'Oh, I just picked it up!' I knew different than that, so I quizzed him until he told me the whole story.

" 'Did you ever notice the old men around the shop,' he asked—'the men with families who drudge along day in and day out—never getting anywhere?' I admitted that I had noticed quite a lot of them.

" 'Well,' he said 'I made up my mind I wasn't going to spend my whole life in a humdrum job at small wages. So I took a home-study course with the International Correspondence Schools that would give me special training for this business.

" 'I tell you frankly that I never dreamed it would be so fascinating and so helpful in my work. I'm making mighty good money—twice as much as formerly—and I'm going to have even a bigger job around here some day.'

"Well, Charley, that boy went straight on up. The members of the firm heard about his studying in his spare time and encouraged him to keep on. You see where he is today.

"And I—I'm still plugging along at the same old job—struggling to make both ends meet. I had just as good a chance as Billy Stevens, but I let it slip by. Yes, I let it slip by.

"Now, Charley, you've got to want your training bad enough to go get it. That's as far as I can help you; you've got to do the rest yourself.

"I've seen a lot of young men come into this business. Those who went ahead were always those who trained themselves for the job ahead. You can do the same thing.

"Start now! It will take only a moment to sign and mail that coupon. It doesn't obligate you in any way. But it's the most important thing you can do today. Some day I know that you will come to me and thank me for what I'm telling you."

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☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ PLUMBING & HEATING
☐ Sheet Metal Worker
☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
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Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Adventure

Reg. in U. S. Patent Office

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WHEN the gold-shipment train is held up and evidence points toward "*Wild*" *Moore*, a certain young range-boomer decides to do some investigating. *Jimmy Devlin* was riding the rods of that train and saw only the legs of the robbers, but he thinks there must be other clues scattered about Thunder Range and sets out to find them. "THE RANGE-BOOMER" is a complete novel by W. C. Tuttle in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

Adventure
JULY 20th 1922
Vol. XXXV No. 5

Too Much Air

by THOMSON BURTIS

A Complete Novelette

Author of "Explain It Yourself," "Flying Cannon," etc.

"THIS town gives me a pain in the tip of my left ear."

The speaker gazed around the crowded lobby of the big New York hotel with bitter contempt mirrored on his rugged face. He appeared to be addressing nobody in particular, but the immaculately groomed man who shared the cushioned bench with him seemed inclined to conversation.

"Which one of the things that ail it give rise to the said earache?" he inquired lightly.

"I would use up the evening to mention 'em," retorted the other, apparently glad to have a chance to talk.

His clothes were ordinary and not too well fitting, and his hands told the world that they had done their share of manual labor. Red hair showed below the dusty felt hat that was tipped slightly forward on his big head.

His companion was pallid in comparison, and radiated the smooth well-being of a successful city man. His eyes were dark and intelligent; his aquiline nose and thin lips giving a hawklike expression to his face.

"I've got fifteen minutes or so to listen," he stated in clipped accents that gave an impression of nervous eagerness despite the

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unimportance of the conversation. "I take it you are not a New Yorker?"

"No, thank ——. I've never been here before, and believe me, never will be again."

"Did the gay white way hypnotize you or something?"

"Gay white way, ——!" retorted the forceful enemy of the metropolis. "I'm here on business, but according to the sense these here wise New Yorkers are showin' I'm bound back for Dakota, where I hail from, to get hold of somebody that can see a dollar if it's stuck less than a yard in front of his nose."

There was a subtle change in the attitude of the other man. His keen eyes quickly sized up the powerful form, and frank, rugged face of his *vis-à-vis*.

"Promoting an oil-well?" he asked casually, his eyes on the buzzing lobby as he spoke.

He drew slowly on a cigaret.

"Nope."

The man from Dakota slid his hat to the back of his head and sank deeper into the upholstery.

"Now you take me," he said. "I'm a rube. I don't know whether a cabaret orchestra is playin' 'Pop Goes the Weasel' or 'God Save the King,' figuratively speakin', in this here metropolitan whirl. I don't wear made-to-order clothes, and I figure anybody that told me that the doorman of this hotel was the King of England could pretty near make me believe it.

"I get off the subway at the wrong stop every time, and couldn't find my way around the Times Square station with all the cops in New York givin' me directions. But when it comes to pullin' bones in a business way I'm a combination of King Solomon and the man that wrote the dictionary, compared with these wise boys around this town."

"What is your proposition?"

"An aviation carbureter. I just got out o' the Air Service—been in it as a mechanic ever since the war broke out. And I got a carbureter—patented and everything—that I can prove on a motor is so much better than anything out that there ain't no comparison. With some money to back me I could have that carbureter on every aviation motor in the world within a year.

"But can I speak a word into the flossy pink ears o' these bald-headed, big-bellied, office-boy-guarded Napoleons of finance? I can not. Their heads are mahogany, like their furniture.

"And now I got to get some carbureter company to take it, and get rooked out o' my eye-teeth. With some money, I could have 'em beggin', but if it took a hundred dollars to buy boots for an elephant I couldn't buy a pair o' leggin's for a hummin'-bird."

"How do you know it's so good?"

"Man, ain't I been with this air game since it started—and a —— good automobile mechanic before that, if I do say it myself?"

"Where does your carbureter beat the others?"

The city man's questions were quick and sharp, and his eyes seemed to bore holes in the other man.

"Do you know anything about flying?"

"No."

"Well, the proposition is this. Gas is a —— of a big item. Any aviation motor uses a lot o' gas—a Liberty, around twenty-two gallons an hour; and others in proportion. My carbureter has less movin' parts than any other, and burns twenty-five per cent. less gas, and will work on the cheapest grade o' gas here. Every other aviation carbureter known uses high-test—and high expense—gas. Less movin' parts means less carburetion trouble, which if you ever roost five thousand feet above the ground with a spittin' motor and nowhere to land you'll realize the value of.

"Less gas and cheaper gas in my carbureter means a savin' of thirty-five per cent. on the gas-bill—millions for the United States Government alone, which runs most o' the flyin' in this country. Overseas, where they show occasional symptoms of intelligence on flyin' in a commercial way, it will mean as much to publicly and privately owned ships. With fifty thousand dollars——"

"You've tried your carbureter on a motor?"

"Forty hours, by ——; and I'm speakin' gospel! Why ——"

"Are you prepared to prove your statements?"

"Lead me to a motor set up on blocks or in a ship!"

The tall, slender city man sat quietly, his lips a thin line. His derby hat was cocked just a trifle to one side, and as he smoked

slowly his eyes watched the passing parade unseeingly.

"How do you figure fifty thousand would start you off with an unknown product?"

"Show the experimental field of the Army Air Service, out in Ohio, what I got, prove to 'em I have the backin' to make 'em, get an order for thousands of 'em, and then watch my smoke!"

The big, tanned mechanic was nervously clenching his misshapen hands as his gray eyes rested on his companion. Both men were as unconscious of their surroundings as if they had been a thousand miles away from the chattering, milling people who surrounded them on all sides.

"My name is Bertrand," said the city man suddenly, and extended a slender, long-fingered hand.

"Mine's Peck—first name William."

Bertrand's slim hand was squeezed into a thin line that for a moment he thought would possess neither breadth or thickness as Peck's huge paw enveloped it.

"Mr. Peck, if you prove your statements as to patents and the value of the carbureter you have, I may be your man. Shall we meet, say at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning, right here?"

"You bet we will, if you say the word! And say, let me tell you——"

"I'm in a little hurry, if you'll excuse me now. I've got the money and the business experience, and would consent to handle the thing for you on say a fifty-fifty basis—you've got the carbureter and I've got the rest. Think it over, keep your mouth shut until tomorrow—don't talk to anybody about it—and then we'll get down to brass tacks. Here's my card."

Although his words were staccato and his face was thin and keen, there was a subtle hardness in Mr. Bertrand that lent much additional force to the impression he made. He seemed to be a combination of the quick, aggressive type of man with a strong leavening of cold shrewdness. Peck, somewhat dazed at the sudden prospect of a successful end to a bitterly disappointing trip, felt Bertrand's influence and took the card silently, his loquacity evaporating.

"You'll be here at eleven tomorrow?"

"You know it, brother!" stated Peck emphatically.

"You've got the carbureter and patent papers with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. See you tomorrow, and in case I want to call you up tonight you'd better give me your address and then stick pretty close to home. I may want to get hold of you."

"I'm livin' right here in room 223, and I won't go out for two reasons—what you said, plus the fact that paying my hotel bill'll leave me with just about enough dough to take a refreshin' ride in the subway."

Bertrand, who had risen and was drawing on his gloves, had lived a precarious existence successfully through some considerable knowledge of the weaknesses of human nature plus what amounted to genius in figuring the right thing to do at the right time.

"Let me loan you twenty dollars to ease your mind, and as advance payment on the rights in your invention."

He quickly drew a twenty from a well-filled note-case, and with a quick good-by left Peck standing silently beside the settee.

"That twenty'll tie yon yokel to me by the bonds of brotherly affection," soliloquized Bertrand as he covered the length of the lobby with long strides. "Right now he'd fight his weight in wild-cats if I told him it would help me out. They fall for that stuff in Dakota."

As a specialist in human nature, the weaknesses thereof interested Bertrand almost exclusively, and his ideas of what weakness included were rather exceptionally cynical.

II

TWO weeks later Bertrand called on Mr. John Dorak.

Mr. John Dorak had started his career as a tradesman, his place of business being a saloon located on a lucrative corner. When prohibition reared its head Mr. Dorak was left with considerable liquor, so he graduated from the ranks of the tradesmen and became a professional man. As a bootlegger he quickly turned what had threatened to be a white elephant into a blessing in disguise, and retired with a comfortable fortune.

The stolid saloon-keeper had known Bertrand for years, and for the last two of them had financed some of the keen Mr. Bertrand's deals which required more lucre than the promoter, confidence man, and all-round without-the-law expert had on hand. Dorak admired Bertrand's

ability and audacity; Bertrand was intrigued with Dorak's money.

"Well, Bart, what's the glad word?" inquired Dorak as Bertrand entered the sitting-room of the small suite which Dorak maintained in a quiet hotel on upper Broadway.

"Not so —— glad, and yet not so bad. I've been working like ——, John."

The stout, red-faced Dorak did not rise from his huge Morris chair, but watched his younger visitor with his small, flesh-rimmed eyes twinkling.

"Work is new to you, eh, Bart?" he chuckled.

There was just a trace of an accent in his throaty words—a barely perceptible hiss that went with the letter s and a constant tendency to change v and w around.

"The stake will be big enough to work for, if I can put it over," returned Bertrand.

He sank into a chair and took out a cigaret, flipping the case open and accomplishing the various operations of lighting his smoke with lightning-like speed.

"Is it so good?"

"It is—and then again it isn't worth two hoots in hallelujah. I swear it doesn't seem possible that I should run into such hard luck with the chance of my life in front of me."

"And legal, too," chuckled Dorak, rubbing his gray, bristly chin with a pudgy forefinger.

'You're getting senile, John. Why this cackle about the law?"

"Some day you learn, Bart. Tell me where we stand, eh?"

"Well, here's the lay. Sorry I didn't have time to more than phone you about it, but I've been busy as a bootlegger—no offense."

Dorak chuckled fatly.

"Go on, Bart."

"I took this rube Peck and we persuaded a civilian aviator I know out on Long Island to let Peck attach his carbureter to the motor. Paid a dollar a minute for the privilege. It ran like a top, and in a half-hour only used six gallons of gas. To make a long story short, I invested several hundred in a used motor from the Curton people and we ran the —— thing on everything but water with that carbureter.

"I studied up on the contraptions; Peck explained things to me; and I decided the stage was set. No question about this thing having all the other entries looking like selling-platers. That's when I phoned you that the proposition was really O. K. and you told me to go ahead on the usual fifty-fifty basis."

Dorak nodded slowly.

"Well, by this time I had my hooks into Peck until he thought I was the greatest philanthropist and catch-as-catch-can business man that ever rolled down the main stem. I showed him the sights and never let him out of my sight. We went out to the experimental field of the Army Air Service at Daysville, Ohio, with model and plans. We submitted it to the chief engineer, but found that we'd have to wait our turn for experiments and all the fol-de-rol connected with the thing.

"I nosed around right away to see if I couldn't get on the inside. Didn't want to miss any bets. You know me, John."

Once again Dorak chuckled, stopping in the act of lighting a cigar to give vent to his admiring hilarity.

"It was —— lucky I did, although I could have chewed wire like stewed macaroni when I got hep."

"Now the plot thickens, eh?"

"I thought it was going to be concrete for a while. I took a young civilian in tow. I was lucky in getting a man in the department—they call it the department on power plants or something like that—which has charge of tests like ours. He was one of the many civilian experts they employ up there. Well, I showed him around, made him think I was quite the goods, and then showed him real money. You got a draft for a thousand which I drew against you, didn't you?"

Dorak pretended to think, with elephantine humor.

"I think I remember it," he chuckled.

"I didn't think it would slip your mind. Well, I told this guy and Peck that it was only natural I should want to be posted on what was going on. I convinced Peck—he's a psalm-singer, you know, and is afraid of —— and all that stuff."

"The two of you should average up good together."

"Don't kid me, John. Your touch is not light enough. Anyway I gave a champagne time for a week solid to this young guy with the beer income, and had him eating out of my hand. Then I told him that any valuable information he gave me would be

worth about a hundred dollars a word, and he came through."

While talking Bertrand gave the impression of quick, vital force; as soon as he stopped talking his immobile face, quiescent body and slow drags at his cigaret almost reversed the impression. That curious hardness and lack of pliability were evident, then.

He watched two smoke rings dissolve slowly into the air, and then resumed, his eyes on the tip of his cigaret.

"This guy—he's named Alton—looked up the dope on stuff submitted which they haven't got around to testing. It's supposed to be strictly confidential, but he got it. He's a whale of a mechanic, and he told me that our carbureter was a wonder, but that there were plans—no model yet—submitted by a guy named Sergeant Cary, down at McMullen, Texas, for a carbureter that would trim ours to a fare-you-well. It's all patented, too."

"How does this one beat yours, Bart?" asked Dorak heavily.

He was all attention, his small eyes resting unwinkingly on the lean, pallid face of his partner.

"Got practically all the advantages of ours, plus no movable parts, and no jets. From what I've learned from books and Peck and Alton, I've got so I know carbureters like a book. Slept 'em, thought 'em, ate 'em the last two weeks, John. This carbureter of theirs practically makes it impossible to have carburetion trouble—and a large percentage of wrecks which account for thousands of dollars' worth of damage in ships and a lot of flyers' lives are the result of plugged carbureter jets.

"Even a single drop of water can clog these little tubes that feed the gas. The two carbureters have the same advantages, practically, except that theirs has no jets. Alton's opinion is that they have a wonder. Three months ago we could have had the Government's order for ours, probably—now we haven't got a prayer unless Alton is wrong, and he's right. The tests made by this guy Cary, who is a sergeant in an Air-Service bunch down there in Texas, are submitted with the plans, but they only have one model of the thing, which is to be sent along when Cook Field looks over the plans and writes Cary that they'll test out his invention."

"So we are out of luck, eh?" grunted Dorak.

'Maybe—maybe not. Knowing your prejudice against being illegal, I made a start at getting out of the hole before I saw you. In the first place, I got Alton under my thumb enough to promise to steal the plans of this Cary carbureter whenever I give him the word.

"It took a five per cent. interest in our project and will take five hundred cash when he does it. He's smelt the flesh-pots and finds the odor so good he wants to wade in with fork and knife. That'll hold things up a bit if necessary. In fact, the more I think of it the more I believe I'll wire him to get 'em right now."

"It would be a good idea," nodded Dorak.

"Not so —— law-abiding now, eh, John?" grinned Bertrand, lighting another cigaret with flashing movements of his long-fingered hands.

"Business is business. According to what you say, it means a lot of money."

"Right. Now of course our best bet is to buy out this other carbureter."

"But if it is so good——"

"Listen. I'm going to McMullen tonight—leaving on the New Orleans Limited. I've forged a letter to Cary on the letterhead of Cook Field, saying that they are not interested in testing the Cary carbureter because the Peck carbureter, recently tested, is so much better than his can possibly be. I signed it with name of the chief engineer at Cook Field. That letter will reach Cary a little before I do.

"I'll apparently come clean with Cary, who is probably a back-woods sap like Peck. I'll say that I know his carbureter is to be tested—that I believe from what I have learned at Cook Field that we each have a fifty-fifty chance. I'll pretend that I don't know that ours has been tested, supposedly, or his turned down.

"I'll say that one of us ought to buy the other out—that one of the two carbureters, or a combination of them, will be *the* carbureter for aviation motors. I'll offer to sell mine or buy his.

"He, with the knowledge that his is in the discard, will be tickled to death to crook me and sell out. When I come back I ought to have the bird in my hand—wrapped up to bring home."

Dorak did not speak for a moment. Then he nodded his bald head slowly.

"Bart, you are a wonder," he observed.

"I've made you a tidy pile in our little deals, John. This will make the whole of it look like lunch money."

"How about Peck?" inquired Dorak. "You say he is ——"

"Doesn't know a —— thing about it—hasn't the least suspicion about this other carbureter, or any crooked work. Of course this Cary carbureter, when it's ours, is ours alone, outside of Alton's five per cent. Peck's junk won't be worth a draft on Ponzi, and we'll give him the air."

He rose and put on his hat.

"So long John—I'll wire you from McMullen. I sure hate the prospect of invading Texas, but it's got to be done. I'll wire Alton to tie up those plans for a while—then we'll be sure of no action on the Cary carbureter, temporarily."

"Good-by, Bart. And try to be legal," chuckled Dorak without rising.

Bertrand grinned thinly at the gross shirt-sleeved form of his partner, so different from himself.

"John, you'd steal a penny from a blind man, and then leave him a match to make it a transaction," he stated.

III

FOUR days later Bertrand alighted from the train which had carried him to McMullen from San Antonio, hailed a car with a "For Rent" sign on it, and was driven to the hotel. He looked cool and clean in his natty straw hat, light Summer suit and carefully polished Oxfords—in which he differed from the majority of passengers.

"Looks to be a nice little town," he soliloquized as the car carried him down a wide, smoothly paved street which was bordered with up-to-date stores.

The hotel, though, almost caused him to faint. It was built of light stucco, in the Spanish style, with a cool, green, palm-studded patio that was an oasis in the border heat.

"Thank —— it isn't going to be as bad as I thought. That trip down from San Antonio took as long as it did from New Orleans over to San Antonio and was twice as dirty," he said to the hotel clerk as he registered.

"That train is a Toonerville trolley proposition, but we'll take care of you, Mr. Bertrand," returned the young clerk.

"Thanks. By the way, you don't happen to know a Sergeant Cary down here, do you?"

"Yes, sir. He's in the Air Service here."

"What do they do with flyers down here? There isn't a field here, is there?"

"Just a small airdrome," explained the clerk. "It's the extreme eastern end of the border patrol the Air Service runs, from here clean through to the Gulf of California along the Mexican border. They have about a dozen flyers and a hundred enlisted men. Some outfit, too."

"Very interesting," stated Mr. Bertrand. "Have a cigar before I go up?"

The clerk accepted with thanks. Just as Bertrand started to follow the bell-hop to the elevator a low-pitched, far-away drone reached his ears.

"Just a minute, son," he called, and went to the patio.

The clerk joined him.

"There was a formation went out on bombing practise. Guess they're coming home," he said.

Out on the street people stopped in their tracks as the roar grew louder and louder, until it was almost deafening. Suddenly the leading ship flashed into sight, a hundred feet above the buildings. Like wild geese ten other planes followed closely in V formation. They were nosed down, and the speed was terrific as they shot across the town. They were so close together that Bertrand almost held his breath. The ships see-sawed up and down in the bumpy air as they sped like bullets across the patio and out of sight, with eleven great Liberty motors roaring wide open.

"That's flying, I'll tell you!" stated the clerk with shining eyes. "The border patrol pilots are the best in the world, and McMullen doesn't take water from any other flight, either! Not with Tex MacDowell, Jim Jennings, George Kennard and that bunch flying here."

"You seem to know them pretty well," observed Bertrand as they walked back toward the desk.

"Oh, everybody in town knows 'em. They're a great bunch. Maintain a room here at the hotel all the while, and some of 'em are in it every night, nearly. They sure throw some good parties."

It was too good a chance for Bertrand to miss. He believed in getting well acquainted with any proposition, including

all its angles, in advance, so he conversed for a half-hour with the young clerk about the border patrol in general and the McMullen flight in particular. Unfortunately, however, his informant knew little of the enlisted personnel of the flight, except that Cary was chief mechanic.

At 4:15 Bertrand finally went to his room, bathed and dressed, and then chartered a car to take him the four miles to the field, which was located next to the cavalry post.

As he entered the small, smooth airdrome he looked around him interestedly. It was certainly small and crude compared with Cook Field. Four sheet-iron hangars bounded one side of the field, a row of frame buildings another side, and two hangars on a third. The northern edge had only a fence. The road led along the line of frame buildings on the southern end, behind which could be seen regular rows of small tents with sides rolled up.

The driver stopped his machine in front of a large building with a wide veranda, on which were gathered possibly a dozen lounging, khaki-clad young men in various positions of ease and comfort. On the line busy mechanics were rolling the ships into the hangars. One De Haviland was still in the air, diving and zooming in graceful wing-turns. A steady breeze from the Gulf of Mexico tempered the furnace-like heat which baked the border country and called trembling heat waves from the hard-packed, shadeless airdrome.

Bertrand approached the group of men with easy assurance, returning their regard with considerable interest. They were different from any group of men he had ever seen. Young, deeply tanned, their O. D. shirts open at the neck and their hair tousled from the recent flight, they seemed to breathe the spirit of the out-of-doors. They were of assorted sizes and looks, but their uniformity of dress and a certain level look about the eyes which comes from habitually looking far into the distance gave the impression that in many things they were all tarred with the same stick.

A short, stocky man with a square, scarred face and a stiff pompadour rose as Bertrand came up the steps. The double-bar of a captain was visible on his shirt collar.

"This is Captain Kennard, I take it," said Bertrand with a smile.

"Right. You have the advantage of me, though."

"My name is Bertrand."

The two shook hands, Bertrand at least a head taller than the army man. Captain Kennard's quick estimate of Bertrand was favorable—he looked all right from his rather attractive smile to his immaculate clothing.

The captain presented him to the other flyers, who acknowledged the introduction pleasantly but without particular interest. It was too hot and the day's work had been too hard on the nerves to leave much enthusiasm for anything.

"I've been hearing a lot about you fellows during the few hours I've been in McMullen," said Bertrand, removing his straw hat and seating himself on a railing. "I can't quite connect you all up with the incidents the hotel clerk was telling me——"

"Charley yearns to fly, and is addicted to enthusiasm," stated Captain Kennard.

"Sure has hero-worship badly," acknowledged Bertrand.

His attempted flattery would not get very far, he quickly decided, with these dusty, booted young fellows. They did not rise at all to his bait.

"You have a Sergeant Cary in your outfit, have you not, captain?" he inquired.

The C. O. nodded.

"He's still up in that ship up there," he said, waving at the De Haviland which was playing around three or four thousand feet high.

"He is a flyer?" asked Bertrand surprizedly.

"No—riding with MacDowell—one of our pilots."

"Oh, yes. I remember the name from our friend Charley's glowing words."

"Pretty well-known name along the border," grinned big George Hickman, who was MacDowell's regular observer.

The two had gone through some tight places together.

"I judge it ought to be," returned Bertrand, his eyes on the ship above.

"Did you wish to see Sergeant Cary?" inquired the captain.

"Very much," smiled Bertrand. "I've got some pretty important business with him."

"You're not from Cook Field, by any chance?" interjected Pop Cravath, the oldest-looking man in the group.

He was an observer, like Hickman.

"Not officially, although I just came from there."

'That carbureter would be about the only important business Cary would have, I figure," nodded Cravath.

The rest of the flyers showed a slight quickening of interest. The low-voiced conversation which had been going on between Beaman and Pete Miller ceased temporarily, and all eyes rested on Bertrand.

"That carbureter is what I'm here about."

"Well, you won't lose any time by Cary's being up in the air," said Captain Kennard with a grin. "Tex MacDowell is sort of a co-inventor of the thing with Cary, and Cary wouldn't say a word about it without MacDowell's O. K. He thinks the sun rises and sets in Tex."

Bertrand did not give any sign of how disagreeable the C. O.'s words were to him. He had figured on an easy victory over an ignorant enlisted man. What he had heard of MacDowell was certainly not of such a nature as to lead any one to believe he was an easy proposition in any kind of a deal.

"I knew the carbureter was submitted to Cook Field in Cary's name, and patented in the same, so naturally I figured he was the only person involved," he explained easily.

"In a way, he is," the flyer told him. "Cary invented the thing; but Tex, in idle conversation one time, suggested the original idea without any knowledge of its possibilities. Cary was once a cowboy on MacDowell's father's ranch, so naturally they're pretty good friends. Cary worked out the thing, and Tex would accept only a ten per cent. interest in it—his father has a load of money, and besides he felt that Cary deserved all the rewards. Anyway Tex will be high cockleorum if it comes to a deal, because Cary doesn't know anything about business, and realizes it. Furthermore, he believes Tex never makes a mistake."

"MacDowell must be a wonder," said Bertrand.

It was his first mistake—the first false note he had struck. The flight did not like the tone in which Bertrand, in his disappointment, had spoken.

"I said *Cary* thought so!" snapped the captain. "Any one who insinuates that Tex——"

"Please don't misunderstand me," begged Bertrand with his most likable smile. "Never having met Mr. MacDowell, of course I could not——"

"Oh, that's all right. Just thought you might have got me wrong. Want to see some pretty flying? Then look at that."

The ship was dropping toward the ground almost as straight as an elevator. Occasionally it would dive briefly, once again coming level and floating downward.

"Probably you don't know how pretty that is," Jimmy Jennings explained to Bertrand, "but a ship flies because of speed—stalling it down like that means that a pilot has such a knowledge of flying, and, above all, can feel his ship so well that he can anticipate its falling off, almost, and counteract it, without speed enough to make his controls twenty-five per cent. effective. The only way that stunt there can be done is to catch the ship before she starts off keel—not wait until she does it. Get me?"

Bertrand nodded. Even without an expert knowledge of flying, the fluttering ship floating lazily high in the air, the motor silent, gave an impression of easy, graceful mastery of the elements that was akin to the effortless smoothness of a soaring hawk. Plainly the pilot of that ship knew exactly what he was doing.

At a thousand feet the motor roared once more, and the De Haviland picked up speed and circled the airdrome in a fast dive. It went northward, in order to use the low approach to the small airdrome which the fence provided. It sped across the fence and then skidded sideward as the pilot fishtailed it to kill speed. The landing was smooth, and without turning on the motor MacDowell succeeded in turning the ship and rolling to the line.

"Pretty judgment of distance," acknowledged Bertrand.

"Fair," agreed Jennings.

BERTRAND watched the two airmen climb out of their ship, with narrowed eyes that took in every detail of their appearance. They moved toward the group on the veranda slowly, immersed in deep conversation. Bertrand had come to the conclusion that none of the flyers to whom he had been talking knew of the forged letter he had sent. Either Cary and MacDowell had not mentioned it or the letter had not arrived. The latter contingency would mean a delay which would be highly annoying.

As a matter of fact, that letter was just what MacDowell and the sergeant were discussing as they walked along the edge of the airdrome. Cary had received the letter that morning, and had had no opportunity to mention it to Tex during the day, without witnesses present.

Both men were extremely tall, Bertrand noted as they came closer. Cary was lath-like in his build, with a long, thin face which was the color of mahogany. He wore a coverall flying-suit that seemed to accentuate his leanness. MacDowell, in O. D. shirt and breeches, was taller even than the sergeant, but wide shoulders and a powerful torso that tapered to the hips made one look twice, at a distance, to realize his great height.

Cary left MacDowell to walk toward the enlisted men's quarters when Captain Kennard sounded off with a lusty—

"Come over here a minute with Lieutenant MacDowell, Cary!"

Cary turned and approached the veranda with MacDowell.

"Lieutenant MacDowell and Sergeant Cary, meet Mr. Bertrand, from Cook Field."

Both airmen shook hands with Bertrand, unspoken inquiry in their eyes. Sudden hope gleamed in Cary's face.

"From Cook Field, you say?" asked MacDowell.

The pilot's speech was soft and deliberate, and as he leaned against a post his big body automatically fell into a posture of complete relaxation.

"I'm afraid I gave Captain Kennard the wrong impresssion," smiled Bertrand, his keen black eyes roving from Cary to MacDowell with quick appraisal. "I came here from Cook Field—but I am not connected with the field in any way. I was just there on business—the same business which brings me here."

"Carbureters," interjected Hickman.

There was a second or two of silence, during which Bertrand's eyes never left the flyer's lean face. It was as brown as the countenances of his comrades, and the clean lines of it gave no trace of weakness. What made it an arresting face were the eyes—remarkably large and wide set, gray in color, and possessed of a level regard that Bertrand found a trifle hard to meet.

"Just what was your business, Mr. Bertrand?" asked Tex finally.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather discuss it privately."

"Sure. Come on, Cary. We'll go in the operations room."

When they had taken chairs Bertrand plunged into the matter at hand without delay.

"I am half-owner in the Peck carbureter, gentlemen, which is now awaiting test at Cook Field. It is infinitely better than any aviation carbureter on the market, by exhaustive and complete tests.

"I heard at Cook Field that you, Mr. Cary, had invented a carbureter which was likewise awaiting test at Cook Field. From what I could hear from mechanics, engineers and others who had looked over your plans, our two carbureters are practically alike in basic principle. In fact, just from the preliminary look-over given the two carbureters, engineers told me that it was almost a toss-up between the two. Either one is infinitely superior, they believe, to anything now on the market.

"Frankly, a majority of them seem to like the Peck carbureter a little better, on account of its proved economy on gasoline. However, as matters stand it is certain that within the next few days—perhaps already—either the Peck or the Cary carbureter will be *the* carbureter. Call it a fifty-fifty gamble for us.

"I have been away from Cook Field ten days—perhaps the tests have been given and the decision made between the two. I haven't had my mail forwarded yet, so I don't know. Have you gentlemen heard yet?"

Cary started to speak, but the lounging MacDowell interrupted him.

"We didn't have a model at Cook Field to be tested," he drawled. "We were waiting to send it until they asked for it. We only have one model."

Bertrand stared at him fixedly, striving to plumb the reason for the sudden glow that flamed in the pilot's gray eyes. He had not moved a muscle, but suddenly something vital and powerful seemed to leap forth from behind that untroubled face and easily relaxed form.

"They've got the letter all right," reflected Bertrand quickly. "Cary started to say it, and his face is too suddenly hopeful. If he hadn't got the letter my proposition wouldn't be so joyful to him. That's what's affecting MacDowell, too."

Aloud he said:

"Now here's my proposition. One or the other of us is going to clean up. We have approximately equal chances. But it's win all or lose all. Why not combine forces? In other words, I'll either swap a fifty per cent. interest in my carbureter for a fifty per cent. interest in yours, or buy yours outright at a reasonable figure, or sell mine at the same figure. One of us ought to own both carbureters. I hope it will be me."

Cary's face was eager as he turned toward Tex. Bertrand had him ticketed in that snap-like mind of his. The tall, lantern-jawed sergeant was one of those mechanical geniuses who are constantly at the mercy of shrewd, matter-of-fact people. Despite the crudeness of his appearance, there was a dreaminess in his eyes which told of a man without particular initiative or power to fight the intangible—but very real—probblems connected with bucking the workaday world and foreseeing its pitfalls. Bertrand cursed the hard luck that caused him to have MacDowell to overcome rather than Cary alone. It would probably mean several thousand extra.

He watched the two airmen closely.

"What do you think of my proposition?" he asked finally, growing a bit uncomfortable under MacDowell's gaze.

"Not so bad, not so good," was the surprizing rejoinder.

Cary looked as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"What's the matter with it?" demanded Bertrand.

"Nothing particular. What's your valuation of our carbureter?"

Bertrand thought quickly. One of his tenets was that a piker never got anywhere.

"Gentlemen, I am not here to haggle over terms. I have got a certain amount of money to gamble with on this deal. I offer you fifty thousand dollars for complete rights in your invention, and a day of bargaining would not change the figures in the slightest."

Cary was as if turned to stone, and then his long face lighted up beatifically. And in MacDowell's eyes was a leaping, dancing flame that caused Bertrand to conclude mentally—

"Hooked!"

Consequently MacDowell's next words came like a bombshell.

"Thanks, Mr. Bertrand, but your offer is rejected. I'm a gambler myself."

"You—you mean you want to buy me out?"

"No, indeed. I guess Cary and I will sit tight with what we've got."

Tex was the only calm member of the trio. Cary was as disappointed and disgruntled as Bertrand, and showed his feelings much more plainly.

Bertrand studied the tall pilot with hard eyes, noting the tranquil face and half-mocking mouth. Only the eyes gave any trace of inner feeling, or knowledge of the greatness of the stakes in the game.

"Probably you've heard that your carbureter is accepted," said Bertrand at length.

"How could we, when we have no model up there? All they have is the plans, so acceptance or rejection would be impossible for a while yet," grinned Tex, watching the other man like a hawk.

Cary, a sudden gleam of light penetrating his brain, studied Bertrand as closely.

"Unless they have tested ours and found it so good that yours can not match it, rejection would be impossible. A decision to adopt yours would be unthinkable without the model, too. I forgot you didn't have your carbureter on the ground."

The suggestion in his first sentence was not lost on MacDowell. In fact, it went to confirm the intuitive idea he had had from the time Bertrand's business was announced.

He arose, swinging his helmet and goggles idly.

"Well, I guess there's no use of talking further. We don't want to sell, and we're not interested in buying. Likewise, it's supper-time. Have some chow with us?"

"No, thanks."

Bertrand controlled his bitter disappointment well, but the hardness in his makeup was obvious as he shed the suave geniality that was his usual pose.

"It seems to me that Sergeant Cary, who I understand is mostly interested in the matter, hasn't had much of a chance to express his views," he said.

"How about it, Cary?" inquired Tex easily, the whimsical quirk at the corners of his mouth very evident.

Cary hesitated.

"I'll abide by your judgment, lieutenant," he said at length.

"I think you're making a mistake," said Bertrand as he started for the door. "I'll be around here a few days more—if you change your mind let me know."

"Thanks. We will. Good evening."

After Bertrand had left Cary looked at his chief dubiously.

"Seemed like a mighty good offer, lieutenant," he said slowly.

"Too good, or else a long way short," agreed Tex. "Look here, Cary. You get a letter saying that your carburetor is turned down, and right away get an offer for all rights from a man that says he doesn't know how things are coming out, but wants to give us fifty thousand dollars to make his position secure. In the first place, I can't believe your carbureter would be turned down without a test; in the next place, Bertrand's visit and that letter came so close together that I can't help but believe the coincidence is too marked.

"Perhaps my little set-tos with our friend old Dave Fitzpatrick have made me too suspicious; but did it ever occur to you that if a man wanted to get hold of our carbureter a forged letter would be a good method of depreciating its value? The whole point is that you've got a —— good thing—so good that you'd be a sucker not to gamble on it, and so would I."

Cary looked at Tex with kindling realization in his eyes.

"You may be right, lieutenant, at that. I can't see why they should turn us down up at Cook so quickly, unless this Peck carbureter is a wonder."

"Shouldn't become agitated if I found out that there was no Peck carbureter at all, Cary. And if our suspicions are anywhere near correct, the end is not yet, as the saying goes. If Bertrand—a pretty smooth article, too, by the way—*was* trying to put over this deal, he'll have a couple more cards up his sleeve to play before he lets us get ahead of him. Which will help pass away the time!"

Cary grinned at the flyer with the freedom of an acquaintance that had begun on the MacDowell ranch when Tex was a spindle-legged boy.

"I presume you'd be sure disappointed if there wasn't any trouble, wouldn't you, lieutenant?"

MacDowell's smile widened slowly.

"Not exactly. But I've got an idea in my head, Cary. I'll talk it over with the captain, and it'll probably end up by our inserting ourselves into Cook Field right soon to see how the land lays and maybe put things over. A wire will let us know whether or not that letter is genuine——"

He broke off his words, and for a moment his eyes remained fixed on Cary.

"No, by George; if Bertrand is crooked and trying to trick us, he'd find a way to know whether or not we wired for confirmation. Of course he probably doesn't think we suspect him, but it's always wise to hand the other fellow the big end of the stick and give him credit.

"Cary, you and I are going to Cook Field. Maybe we'll find we're suckers—and maybe we'll find we stand to win. If we're correct in our suspicions, there will probably be something to buck up there, because Bertrand must have a stand-in or he wouldn't know so much."

"In which case I'll be glad to have you along, lieutenant," declared the loyal Cary.

IV

IN A few days Tex, with a thirty-day leave in his pocket, was nearing St. Louis on his way to Daysville. Cary had seized the opportunity to make a flying visit to his home in Michigan, and was to meet him in Daysville.

The monotonous ride on the train had given Tex time for considerable reflection over the matters connected with Bertrand and Sergeant Cary's invention, and he had almost reached the point where he was calling himself more or less of a fool.

It had been many months before that, in a casual conversation with Cary, he had hit upon the basic idea of the new carbureter. Cary, a really unusual mechanic, had succeeded in working the thing out, and after weeks of painstaking testing and changing had finally produced their one model—a model that was so far in advance of any other carbureter that there was no comparison.

Being without the tiny jets or movable float that between them account for carbureter troubles in aviation motors, it added at one stroke both economy and a certainty of operation that was practically fool-proof.

Dave Fitzpatrick, a lifelong enemy of MacDowell's father, had been trying sedulously for months to gain his revenge on old "Roaring Bill" of the Circle Eight ranch by

ruining his son. Seeing an opportunity to steal a valuable invention before it had been patented, he had used a part of his widespread organization along the border to get it into his hands.

Through a combination of luck and a nervy flying-trip by Tex himself the theft had been forestalled, and one "Weasel" Williams, a valuable member of Fitzpatrick's organization, had been sent for a long stay within the walls of a Texas penitentiary.

Events had happened thick and fast after that, and for months Fitzpatrick and MacDowell had fought each other. It had ended with the complete downfall of the old smuggler, Fitzpatrick; but meanwhile the carbureter, which Tex was handling for the unpractical Cary, was almost forgotten. His efforts to escape the net which Fitzpatrick had spread for him carried Tex to Donovan Field for a few months, and Cary, the invention being completed, almost lost interest in it during the tedious waiting for patents.

The attempted theft of it, however, had received much publicity, and as a precautionary measure the model had been reposing in a safety-deposit box of the McMullen bank.

When Tex returned to McMullen after completing his stay at Donovan Field the patents had been received, and he forwarded blue-prints, specifications and the test reports on it to Cook Field. Bertrand's descent on the scene had suddenly stimulated the waning interest of the McMullen flight in the invention.

As the train thundered along on its way to St. Louis Tex indulged in one of his rare intervals of introspection. He wondered whether his whole life, particularly his last year as a member of the border patrol, had not brought him into the frame of mind where he was entirely too ready to jump to the conclusion that few people were to be trusted.

His motherless youth on the big ranch, where he had worked and played—none too innocently—with the Circle Eight punchers under the tolerant eye of Roaring Bill MacDowell, had finally resulted in his pulling up stakes for a short but eventful hobo tour at the tender age of seventeen. A year later he returned, and three years at a Northern university provided a striking change from the gambling, roving year which had preceded his adventure in education.

Then the war came along, and within a month he had left college and was a member of the Royal Air Force. Three Hun planes and months as a prisoner in Germany had caused divers decorations to ornament his blouse. 1920 found him commissioned a first lieutenant in the American Army Air Service, since which time he had been a member of the outfit which was the pride of the service—the Mexican border patrol.

There was a faintly quizzical smile on his lips as, with unseeing eyes resting on the green country slipping away behind, Tex reviewed the hectic months with which his father's old enemy had provided him as soon as he learned that the son of the man who had driven him, Fitzpatrick, out of Texas years before in disgrace, was on the border.

By every means known to a powerful and totally unscrupulous outlaw the old smuggler had striven to frame Tex. Once he had come so near succeeding that it was only Fitzpatrick's own complete downfall which had saved the young flyer from a general court martial as the result of a frame-up for smuggling opium.

Tex, being the son of his father from his superb body and fast-working mind to his rather frequent lapses from propriety, had reveled in the struggle. He had met it with the savage satisfaction in fighting against odds which had characterized his father's stormy career in Texas, and which had been responsible for most of the tight places in which the old Southerner had found himself.

Time and time again Captain Kennard and others of the friends who swore by the lazy, tranquil young flyer had begged him to use some sense and avoid the pitfalls which Fitzpatrick had spread for him—and always Tex had walked into them for the joy of getting out again, and the chance of finally laying Fitzpatrick low by turning his own weapons against him.

He had accomplished it; but certainly those months, when self-defense had made it imperative to suspect almost every one outside of his immediate circle, were bound to result in his looking at most things and most people as suspicious until they proved themselves otherwise. Gamblers, crooks, gunmen, folk of the underworld—all had been part of his life at times, and a more or less unconscious cynicism, leavened with a certain large tolerance, was the result of his contact with the highest and the lowest strata of society.

All these factors contributing to his make-up were not in MacDowell's mind, by any means. However, being averse to "kidding himself," as he expressed it, he was half-humorously asking himself some questions.

"I wonder whether old Dave Fitzpatrick has caused me to have a blood-and-thunder view of this mortal coil?" he mused. "I reckon I've been so contaminated by that bunch of cheap gunmen and smugglers that every time I get to know a stranger I figure he's trying to rook me—as though I was one of the prominent fair-haired boys. Good Lord, but I'm getting to think I'm important!"

Nevertheless, he could not shake from his mind the seed of suspicion which had been planted there. It was a fact that the carbureter was valuable; it was certain that so shrewd a man as Fitzpatrick had thought it worth while to attempt to appropriate it; and as a matter of fact the angles to Bertrand's appearance on the scene and the appearance of that suspicious letter at precisely the time when it would do the most good for Bertrand, made it seem not too far fetched to be watchful and on the alert against foul play of any kind.

"Things of that kind have been pulled and will be pulled again," he reflected as the train drove slowly through the grimy outskirts of St. Louis.

"And it's a dead cinch that Cary would have fallen for it. In case he had, and the letter was a fake, it would never have been found out probably, because it's natural to believe that Bertrand has sneaked in to the inner circle up there, or he wouldn't know so much.

"He's a keen *hombre,* and would have ways of preventing any further correspondence with Cary which would arouse any suspicion in that dreamy old codger's none-too-aggressive mind. Cary's name was the only one Bertrand would have known in connection with the carbureter, and he'd figure a sergeant as easy meat."

He had almost argued himself out of all his suspicions, an hour before. Now, as they appeared not too unbelievable, there was a change in the flyer which would have been inexplicable to one who did not know him well. Instead of worried resolution, his whole aspect seemed to radiate a new satisfaction and interest in the trip.

His big body was sunk in the seat as lazily as ever, but there was a new glow in his eyes. It could not have been the prospect of a wild two days ahead of him in the company of Roj Berwick, a St. Louis youth who had been in the Royal Air Force with him—for that delightsome experience had been arranged for before Tex had left McMullen.

He expected plenty of good liquor, and indulgence in a certain big game of draw poker which went on nightly within the exclusive portals of one "Big Jack" Brady. Berwick had written him all about it.

However, add to those things the spice of a struggle ahead, and you have the essential ingredients of an earthly paradise, to MacDowell's mind.

V

TEX, carrying his grips, plowed through the crowd at the train gates, a tall young fellow of an ascetic cast of countenance waved a languid hand from the outskirts of the mob.

"Bear east by north, Tex!" he called.

Successfully met, Tex dropped his grips to shake hands.

"Sure glad to see you, Roj," he said with a grin. "How did you happen to remember what train I got in on?"

"What I jokingly call my brain got going about half an hour ago," returned the equable Berwick, grabbing one of MacDowell's grips. "Bring any civies with you? You will be unable to solace your soul with a straight flush at Brady's in that neck-choking outfit you have on."

"I dragged out the old suit and rolled the moth-balls off it before I left. How's tricks, Roj?"

Berwick told him as they made for his car. He was nearly as tall as Tex, and looked fully as tall because of his thinness. He was dressed with unobtrusive perfection, parted his glossy black hair in the middle, had the reputation of dancing divinely, could imbibe straight whisky to an unbelievable extent, and was officially credited with seven Hun planes on the records of the Royal Air Force.

He had never been known to get excited, but in his calm way had painted St. Louis red ever since inheriting some half-million dollars at the death of his only known relative, an uncle. He had flown in the same pursuit squadron with Tex overseas, returning with a bad leg as his only souvenir of four years at the front.

He lived at the Masterson Hotel, and conducted Tex to his suite, where the flyer proceeded to intrust his wrinkled citizen's clothes to the care of the hotel valet.

"Now tell me the straight of some of these wild rumors that the public prints have been carrying now and again regarding the adventures in crime of one Lieutenant Lee MacDowell," commanded Berwick. "I go into a movie theater to sleep off a jag, and get awakened by having to watch you land in some corner of Texas with one wheel gone and some crazy galoot hanging on the end of a wing. I pick up a paper to read about the Browns losing another game, and see where you dump some thug out of an airplane. Careless thing to do."

Tex grinned at the blasé Berwick, who had his feet on a table and was resting comfortably on the middle of his back in a big chair.

"I'll outline the main events of my border career, with suitable modesty, at dinner," he replied. "Meanwhile, to the bath. I haven't hit an honest-to- —— bathtub since Christopher Columbus was a corporal."

During the intricate convolutions necessary to shed the harness of military service from the human form Tex found time to sketch his mission for Berwick, to that gentleman's great interest. When he had finished the ex-pilot took a contemplative puff of his monogramed cigaret, one of which Tex had disdainfully rejected in favor of a smoke he rolled himself, and finally said:

"Bertrand—some way the name sounds familiar to me, but I can't just place it. What does this bird look like?"

"Medium tall, with an aquiline nose and dark hair and eyes. Around thirty or thirty-five, I should say. Pretty keen-looking and keen-talking proposition."

"I've got him," announced Berwick calmly. "Met him, by the way, up at the place we're going tonight. Never knew what he did for a living. He's a —— good gambler and seemed to be a nice fellow."

"He may be, for all I know," returned Tex. "Probably my brain is cutting out, but it won't hurt to keep my eye peeled. We've got a pretty good proposition, I believe—good enough to warrant a lot of trouble."

Shaved and bathed, he quickly donned the long-unused civilian clothes. He hated to be conspicuous, which his wings would make him in a city so far from any flying-field, and besides it was distinctly obligatory to appear at Big Jack Brady's in nothing but the most unobtrusive manner or clothing.

Civilian clothes did not change his appearance very much—his great height was not so obvious and the width of his shoulders less pronounced; but a white silk shirt threw into relief the deep tan and fine wrinkles which marked him as an outdoor man.

The two friends had just settled themselves at a small table in one corner of the well-filled dining-room, and Berwick had ordered dinner, when Tex swore feelingly.

"Left the makings up in your boudoir, Roj. Inasmuch as I can't inhale those effete, perfume-soaked, linotyped coffin-nails of yours——"

"If you must yield to your vulgar tastes, shag yourself up-stairs and procure the alfalfa. The door is unlocked."

"You must have a great confidence in human nature," drawled Tex. "Some day a baby carriage'll run over you because you're too careless to get out of the way."

"If I lock the door I never can get back in, because I always lose the key. What good does it do? Anybody could go up to the desk and call for any key if they wanted to get in a room in a big hotel like this."

"Have it your way," grinned Tex as he slowly got up and started to weave his way through the crowded tables.

Berwick followed him with his eyes, a faint smile on his lips. He remembered vividly the lounging walk and gently slurred speech of his former comrade, and as he watched him disappear through the doors into the lobby there was a faint homesickness in his heart.

Somehow Tex seemed to typify all the reckless freedom and careless zest of the airmen, and he brought back with a rush the fascination of the game and all that went with it. Suddenly the luxury of his surroundings, the rich perfection of the meal that was coming, seemed stale and artificial.

Tex walked down the hall toward Berwick's room, his footsteps muffled by the thick carpet. The door opened easily, and he stepped in. For a second he hesitated in surprize, and then launched himself straight at the form of a man who had been going through his grips, turning in startled fear as the door opened and the flyer came in.

The intruder was big and husky, and for a half minute there was a silent, desperate

struggle. The thief had gone to the floor under the power of MacDowell's lightning-like attack, but although on the bottom he proceeded to demonstrate that he was far from a weakling. He was heavier than Tex, although several inches shorter, and the rough-and-tumble fighting gave Tex no advantage of height or reach. On the contrary, it gave his opponent the advantage, for there were apparently no weapons which he disdained to use.

Tex was striving to pin his arms down when the man turned and sank his teeth in one hand with a vicious snap. The flyer grabbed him by the hair and retaliated by lifting the man's head and slamming it to the floor with all his strength. He tore his hand from the painful grip of the thief's teeth, but with a sudden lunge his opponent succeeded in unseating him, and staggered to his feet.

Apparently he was a trifle dizzy from the sudden contact of his head with the floor, for Tex, with a catlike leap to his feet, landed a wicked swing to the jaw that floored his man with a thud. He bounced from the floor like a rubber ball, however, his dark, broad face crimson with blood.

He made a rush for the door, but Tex forestalled him. He threw himself at the man's knees in the manner of a man making a football tackle, and brought him down once more.

Fierce as the struggle was, no furniture had been overturned; and aside from the dull, carpet-muffled thuds when the man had fallen to the floor there had been surprizingly little noise. His last fall appeared to have taken the wind out of the thief—his struggles were weaker, and in a moment he was lying motionless on the floor, MacDowell sprawled on top of him to keep him pinned down.

He had felt a gun in the man's coat pocket, and chanced a quick try for it. He got it, his opponent making no try to prevent him. A glance assured the pilot that the revolver was loaded, so he climbed from his perch with the muzzle of the gun at his victim's head.

"Get up if you want to," he said slowly, the deliberation of his speech unusually obvious.

His eyes were darker than usual, and in them the flame of the struggle had not yet died down. He leaned easily against the closed door, dusting himself off with one hand while he held the gun on the vanquished contestant with the other.

THE man got up slowly, his dark face sullen. He wiped off some of the blood which streamed from a gash in his forehead.

"Well, go ahead and call a cop," he blurted.

"Now that may be a good suggestion," grinned Tex, examining the thick-set man before him with an appraising glance that took in the rather neat clothing, now rumpled in the mêleé, and the square-jawed, swarthy face which, despite its sullenness, did not exactly seem to be that of a professional criminal.

"Well, what are you gonna do?"

"Give me time. My brain doesn't work that quick," returned Tex. "It may not be unfitting for me to inquire what you were doing in this room when I hopped you?"

"I was prob'ly tryin' to find the public library," was the retort.

Behind his lounging, almost disinterested attitude MacDowell's mind was working swiftly. There were two ways to find out the truth of his suspicions as to the man's errand; he decided quickly to stake his chances on one throw. Should his random shot find the mark, his suspicions of Bertrand would be verified.

"The point is that I knew what you were after up here when I left the dining-room down-stairs. In fact I left it on purpose to see that you had a good time while searching for the library," he said gently.

His prisoner looked up inquiringly.

"Having had conversation with a dark-haired, dark-eyed fellow of about thirty with a face like a hawk and a smooth way about him, you were calling on a carbureter you thought might be hiding in my baggage somewhere," pursued Tex casually, his eyes hidden below drooping lids.

He was keenly watchful, however; and, to his mind, he had scored. He had to admire the man's self-control, for if his shot in the dark had been a true one it must have been a stunning surprize. Sudden fear and startled unbelief had shown in the man's eyes.

"Got any more jokes?" he inquired flippantly. "And I'm missin' my supper. Not that the hoosegow serves such——"

"Sit down, you library-hound, and——"

The flyer's equilibrium was upset by the

unceremonious advent of Berwick. He walked in unconcernedly, taking in the tableau calmly.

"Thought you were never coming back," he said to Tex.

"Hello, Haskins," he went on. "And what may you be doing up here?"

For the first time the prisoner showed signs of uneasiness. His eyes dropped to the floor, and he twisted an edge of his coat between his hands nervously. Apparently Berwick's appearance had been a shock to him.

"Haskins is a taxi-driver in our fair city who has hauled me full many a time and oft," Berwick told Tex.

He was as unruffled as possible—apparently he was not surprized in the slightest to find the airman holding a gun in his own room on a taxi-driver he knew, who had no business there.

Berwick sat on the edge of a table, and flicked the ash from his cigaret.

"Speak up, Haskins," he said crisply.

Haskins wet his lips with his tongue.

"W-well, sir——"

He hesitated again.

"You might as well come clean, old top," Tex interjected slowly.

He had resumed his easy posture against the wall.

"We know that you were after that carbureter. If we hadn't known it you would have given yourself away when I accused you of it a moment ago. Tell us the yarn, and tell it straight, and it may be that you can eat in the bosom of your family tonight instead of the jail. What say?"

Berwick had no difficulty in plumbing what was in the flyer's mind, and he carried it on without the slightest indication that MacDowell's words had opened up new possibilities in the situation.

"Haskins, you know me and I know you, and consequently there's not a —— of a lot of sense in your doing anything but what Mr. MacDowell has said. It can't do you any harm and it may do you some good if you come clean."

Haskins glanced quickly at Berwick, and then decided to talk.

"It's like this, Mr. Berwick," he said doggedly. "Just a few minutes ago this fellow that you—" looking at Tex—"described comes up to me out front of the hotel. I was in my taxi out there. He says that he wants to go to the Statler. Then all of a sudden he says he's forgotten something. He tells me to go up to his room, giving this number, 233, and get this thing, which he says is a sample carbureter he's tryin' to interest a man in down to the Statler. He says it'll be in either the brown suit-case or the club-bag with the initials L. M. on 'em. He gives me a key I didn't need to use.

"I didn't exactly like the proposition, and tells him so. He figures a minute and finally comes clean, as I thought. He says he can't go himself—that he don't dare go in the hotel right then on account of somebody lookin' for him that he don't want to meet up with. I sort o' figures that maybe it was cops. Anyway he offers me a hundred cold cash—" and Haskins proceeded to draw the roll of bills from his pocket in proof of his story—"to go up and get the thing.

"I didn't inquire no further—I'm being laid off the end o' the week and I needed the money. I busts in here, figurin' to say it was a mistake if there was anybody here. I didn't know whether it was really his room or not; but I swear I didn't know it was yours, Mr. Berwick."

"Hum. What are you being laid off for, Haskins?"

"There was a feller got nasty about his fare and I crowned him one and had to go to court and they made me pay a fine. If they wasn't short o' men I'd be off now."

"Well, what's the dope, Tex? Go down and grab this bird? I suppose it's Bertrand you're figuring it to be, isn't it?"

Tex nodded. He walked to the table and laid down the gun.

"I don't just know what to do," he stated at length, his remarkable eyes aglow once more. "But I'm inclined toward thinking that we ought to allow Mr. Bertrand a little more rope, in order to have him successfully hang himself."

"Even my agile brain fails to follow you," said Berwick.

"Well, what have we got on him now that's so —— important?" queried Tex. "I'd sort of like to have a peek at the inwards of this deal all around. It may be Bertrand is just the representative of a clique—get me? If we grab him now it means a case in court, a long stay in St. Louis for me, and the testimony of a man whom the court will consider a rough-neck taxicab-driver recently convicted of smiting a luckless passenger on the dome. And when we finish, if we're lucky, I'll have put out

a lot of dough, lost a lot of time, and Bertrand might get a few months or something like that."

"And on the other hand?" suggested Berwick languidly.

"On the other hand," Tex went on, rolling himself a cigaret with the one-handed dexterity of a cowboy or a movie idol, "if in return for a present of his hide, in good condition, our friend Haskins here should go down-stairs and tell Bertrand there was no carbureter in my luggage, Bertrand will transfer his activities to Cook Field probably. Judging by his trip to McMullen and all the effort he's going to, the stake is considered big enough to take a lot of trouble for.

"He wouldn't have gotten the dope on our carbureter if he didn't have friends and influence behind him, I don't believe. It's supposed to be confidential at Cook Field. Up there he'll probably show his hand further, not knowing that we've already seen it and can't be bluffed—no matter how much he raises. That'll save trouble, give us a chance to throw our hooks into the whole works, and in addition help pass away the time."

"Which is the sole and only object of existence," stated Bertrand.

"There's something in what you say," grinned Tex. "And if there's any sight I admire to see, it's the biter getting bitten."

"And if there's anything you'd crawl on your hands and knees for from here to San Francisco, it's a scrap of any nature whatsoever," observed Berwick. "I might even go as far as Daysville myself if guaranteed a grand-stand seat and full police protection."

"You're on. What say, Haskins?"

The taxi man, who had been listening closely to the conversation, a lot of which was Greek to him, lost no time in expressing his sentiments.

"It sounds sweet in my ears," he said emphatically. "You mean you're gonna let me off if I tell this crook there ain't no carbureter, and that I got in and out without bein' seen?"

"Right. Percolate back to your cab, give him the sad news, and report," Berwick told him.

"By the way, where is this world-shaking invention of yours?" he inquired after Haskins had disappeared.

"I had a tiny kind of a hunch to play it safe, so I sent our lone model to myself, at Daysville, by registered, insured and otherwise safeguarded express," grinned Tex. "Bertrand must know we have only one model, inasmuch as he knows anything about it at all. It was stated in our correspondence to Cook Field."

He took a deep drag at his cigaret, and then propounded a question.

"I'm rather wondering what he'd do with it if he got it—the model, I mean," he said.

"Use it to pick his teeth with," suggested Berwick.

"Don't get clever, Roj. What I mean is this. It's patented and all that, and specifications of it are on file at Cook as well as the patent office. Being our one model, its theft *would* hold up negotiations for months——"

"Specially if the specifications were stolen as well."

"That's a thought, too. By stealing the model the people he represents gain a lot of time, and it gives 'em breathing-space to think up some new dodges to annoy us. It would take months to construct a new one."

Berwick inspected the tip of his cigaret minutely as he inquired without emotion—

"Do you suppose this gang of thugs are in earnest enough to conspire against your personal safety, Tex?"

"No. Don't get any *Nick Carter* ideas in your head. You see it's Cary who's the main cockleorum anyhow, and the casual murder of two men is quite a bit of trouble to go to for no good whatever. The patent rights would degenerate to our heirs and assigns forever, I presume," returned Tex.

"That's right, I guess. It'll be a nice little deal to watch at Cook Field anyhow. Maybe before. By the way, I first met Bertrand up at Big Jack's. He's up there every once in a while when he happens to hit St. Louis."

"Add a little spice to the party," drawled Tex, his eyes dancing. "Do you know anything about him?"

"Not a —— thing. Just ran into him two or three times. He seemed to be a good egg, with plenty of kale. Never did hear what his business was, or whether he had any. Maybe Big Jack can give us some light."

The door opened unceremoniously and Haskins came in.

"He wasn't in the taxi, but after I set a minute or two he came out of a store and I told him what you told me," he reported. "He didn't seem so much disappointed as you might think, at that. Am I through?"

"As far as I'm concerned," Tex told him. "I hope you choke if you ever bite another hand, though."

"Hope I never have to," returned Haskins with the first hint of a smile that had illumined his face since his sudden and painful introduction to the Texan.

"And thanks for lettin' me off."

"Quite welcome," replied Berwick airily, and Haskins departed.

"Now let's chow, preparatory to indulging in vulgar pursuits," suggested Tex. "I yearn to listen to the clicking of the chips, and to peer upon the wine when it is pink. Likewise——"

"Play against Bertrand, eh? I wrote you how big the game was, didn't I? I thought so. If you're still in practise and Bertrand is there, it ought to be pretty to watch!"

VI

BRADY conducted a somewhat unusual establishment. As a matter of fact he did not run a gambling-house, as the term is usually construed, at all. It was a large, luxuriously furnished apartment, to which less than fifty men, all of them wealthy and personally known to Brady, had entrance. Big Jack himself and a huge, white-headed, grinning negro and his wife, who acted as cook, were the only people connected with running the establishment.

There were no iron doors or gratings through which a wary lookout peered forth at the coming guest, demanding a trick knock on the door or a password before allowing any one admittance.

To all intents and purposes the apartment was the comfortable home of Brady, where a few men could gather to play poker, be served with an excellent variety of drinks by the negro factotum, and absorb club sandwiches or other light nourishment from the hands of Eliza, in the kitchen. A guest did not pay for either his food or his liquor, as such; a two per cent. cut for the house on all chips bought constituted full payment for everything.

Every habitué of the apartment was known to be "all right," that term including the possession of a certain amount of breeding and discretion as well as wealth. The games at Brady's were far from small, being table stakes with a five-hundred-dollar take-out and the privilege of playing another five hundred behind one's stack at all times.

Should a stranger by any chance wander in, he would see nothing but a quiet game or two going on, with Brady a genial host. Drunkenness was tabu, noise anathema at Big Jack's. There had never been a fight or a disturbance of any kind whatsoever, and by the use of a little discretion in the matter of arriving and departing when there were an unusual number of guests present Brady had never been called on to use any of the influence that he was known to have with City Hall.

Tex, vouched for in advance by Berwick as a transient who was perfectly all right, took in his surroundings with considerable interest. He was introduced to Brady, a portly, genial man who looked to be a successful business man—and was. He was also introduced to four of the five men who were sitting in the large, richly furnished room which he and Berwick had entered from the hall. The fifth man was Bertrand.

The New Yorker could not hide his surprize at seeing MacDowell there.

"I didn't know you were so familiar with the city," he said smilingly as he shook hands with Tex.

"I'm not, but I've got a good guide," rejoined Tex, his eyes alight with reckless anticipation.

He had an idea that Bertrand was a foe distinctly worthy of any one's steel.

"On the way to Daysville, I presume?" observed Bertrand after the two newcomers had seated themselves in comfortable chairs, awaiting a highball each.

From another room the subdued rattle of chips occasionally rose above the hum of conversation.

"Right you are. I shouldn't be surprized if you were on your way there yourself."

"Maybe we can make the trip together," suggested Bertrand.

"I'm dragging along as well," interjected Berwick lazily.

Desultory conversation during the slow sipping of a round of drinks gave Tex an opportunity to study his companions, who apparently had been about ready to start playing; for George, the general retainer, set up a table and arranged chairs around it while the group imbibed their liquor.

Three of the prospective players looked to be substantial business men. Bevins was

gray headed, tall and gaunt, dressed meticulously, and to MacDowell's experienced eye looked to be rather the best player of the three. Cairns and Cutler were stout, florid, jovial—and the three of them called each other by their first names, Tex noted.

The other man, who was engaged in conversation with Bertrand, was by all odds the youngest of the group.

He was a chunky, pasty-faced youth named Peabody, on whose weakly handsome countenance sprouted a diminutive blond mustache. He seemed nervous and ill at ease, and his eyes had an excited glitter in them which heightened the impression of tenseness about him.

"I don't believe I'll play," announced Berwick as the gathering arose to take their places at the table. "Seven is too many anyhow, and I'd rather watch."

"There'll probably be enough for another table before long," said Brady, coming to the table with a large wooden chip-container.

Five-hundred-dollar stacks were already counted out in each compartment of it, less the house cut. Each player paid Brady for his chips.

"You understand the game, Mr. MacDowell?" inquired Brady as he conducted his transactions. "Draw poker, table stakes, with the privilege of playing five hundred dollars back of your stack."

"Thanks—Roj here told me the lay pretty thoroughly, I guess," returned Tex, dividing his stack into convenient piles.

Bertrand was across the table from him, with the blond young man on his left. Then came Cutler, who sat next to Tex. Cairns and Bevins were on MacDowell's left, between him and Bertrand.

Berwick sat behind Tex, and, as the cards were being shuffled by Bertrand, found time to whisper—

"Bertrand good — Peabody wild — the other three average and conservative."

The flyer relaxed into his comfortable, leather-upholstered chair, and settled down to the unalloyed joy of a good game of draw poker. He was a gambler to his finger-tips —to such an extent that those who knew him best and valued him most counted it his greatest weakness. The Texan's vices were none of them petty, but rather the effervescence of an overflowing strength and vitality.

If weakness is allowing a desire to rule a man rather than the man his desire, then the gambling spirit was certainly MacDowell's chief fault. Captain Kennard, who in his rovings on two continents as an engineer had absorbed something of a knowledge of human nature, often said that the restless desire on MacDowell's part to pit himself against competition of any kind —and that eager welcoming of a contest of any nature whatsoever was his outstanding trait—found one of its outlets in gambling.

Sometimes he gambled with life as the stake, sometimes money, but always it was the satisfaction in the struggle for its own sake which drew him.

That being the case, it was inevitable that poker, with its combination of luck plus ability, should be MacDowell's favorite indoor sport. There are three necessities in the makeup of a good poker player—patience, nerve, and a knowledge of human nature. The first two were bred in Tex—the last had come to him in his relationships with many different kinds of people, and an instinctive ability to judge men which he had inherited from his two-fisted ranchman father.

During the first half-hour Tex got no cards which he regarded worthy of playing, and he was not sorry. It gave him an opportunity to watch the game and judge his men. He lounged lazily in his seat, his eyes watchful under drooping lids. He played poker, when he played, to the exclusion of everything else. Not a flicker of expression did he miss on the faces of the other men.

Bertrand had been playing very little. Finally there came a hand which Bevins opened for twenty dollars, every one else having passed. Peabody and Bertrand stayed. Bevins took one card, as did Peabody, and Bertrand two.

"Didn't open, didn't raise after the pot was opened, and took only two," reflected Tex. "And supposed to be a good poker-player. Therefore he wouldn't be holding a kicker to a pair, I don't believe."

Bevins checked, and Bertrand promptly bet two hundred dollars. Peabody dropped. Bevins hesitated, and finally called. Bertrand showed three kings against aces up, held by Bevins.

"He apparently didn't think much of his threes. That's what I call being —— conservative before the draw," mused Tex, and

filed the incident in his mind for future reference.

The game began to get faster. Finally Tex got three sixes pat. Bevins was the dealer, and Bertrand opened for forty dollars. Cutler stayed, and Tex promptly raised the pot sixty dollars.

"That finishes me," stated Cairns, and Bevins also threw in his hand without delay. Peabody had passed after Bertrand opened.

Bertrand studied his cards a moment, and then shoved a stack in the middle of the table.

"Up two hundred more," he announced calmly.

Cutler threw in his hand.

MacDowell's eyes rested for a moment on the immobile, pallid face across the table, remembering the previous hand Bertrand had been in.

"By all the laws, that should be the cue for me to drop. He's got something good probably—when a man plays three kings like he did——"

He hesitated an instant, and then decided to stay. A draw to threes was always a good one.

"Cards?" inquired Bevins, deck in hand.

"I have enough," smiled Bertrand.

"I'm still shy a few," stated Tex. "Two."

He slowly riffled his hand without looking at it. His eyes never left Bertrand's face, which was as expressionless as if it were a mask.

"I'm betting three hundred," announced the New York man easily, and slid the stack to the middle of the table.

MacDowell looked at his hand. He had drawn a pair of fives to go with his three sixes.

"And five hundred," he said gently. "That uses up the money back of my hand."

"And beats me," rejoined Bertrand. "I opened on a pair of kings."

He spread his hand and showed only a pair of kings. And right there the flyer's opinion of him as a poker-player went up many degrees.

"Keen enough to figure the effect of his other play—just bull luck in my draw kept me from being bluffed cold," he reflected as he scooped in the pot.

The game went on silently, seeming to grow more open with every hand. Bertrand was the biggest winner, but Tex was not far behind him. Peabody, who was playing with nervous recklessness, was losing. He was raising a great deal before the draw, and trying to bluff his way through. Apparently the other men knew him, for his raises never kept them out.

Bertrand was the furthest ahead because he had been lucky in holding a high hand on almost every one of Peabody's big bluffs, and collected an unusual pot each time because of the unwillingness of the other men to drop against Peabody. Each time Bertrand had lain low until the last moment, and then, after every one had stayed, sent the pot soaring.

He was sitting in the driver's seat, for Peabody was sitting on his left, and consequently after one of his raises every one else in the game had a chance to stay before Bertrand got in his raise. Sometimes he waited until after the draw to do most of his raising, sometimes tilting it before.

The game had been in session for about three hours, and this had happened several times, when Tex became somewhat suspicious. Playing the game with all the concentrated attention there was in him, he let no detail slip, and it was inevitable that he should finally come to the conclusion that there was a chance that all was not as it should be.

Came a big pot, which Tex raised before the draw on absolutely nothing. He always figured a bluff as a good investment. If it worked, he was so much money ahead; if it didn't, it would be worth three or four calls later when he really had something.

Bertrand had opened, and Tex raised it a hundred dollars. Bertrand stayed, but every one else dropped. Tex drew two cards. He had made a few raises on threes and been called each time after the draw, so he figured Bertrand to believe there were threes out against him. Bertrand himself drew two cards.

"Small threes," thought Tex as he looked at his hand.

It contained a seven and a five in addition to the jack, queen and king which he had drawn to.

"Well, I guess the question is, who's got the biggest ones?" he drawled easily.

He put a face card on top of his hand, and for just a second handled his hand carelessly as he scratched his forehead with the edge of the cards.

"Check it along," said Bertrand.

"Three hundred is my answer," returned Tex, suiting the action to the word with a

stack of blue chips, valued at fifty dollars.

Bertrand threw down his hand, face up, without hesitation.

"Three sixes opened."

"I believe I'll drop out for a minute or two and have a drink," said the flyer as he scooped in the chips. "Deal me out a few hands. Join me, Berwick?'

Roj had just had a little lubrication; but as Tex arose, turned his back to the table and looked down at him, something in his face made Berwick agree with alacrity. The two wandered across the large, library-like room and took chairs in one corner.

"Well, how are you enjoying the game?" queried Berwick after drinks had been ordered.

"Fine—it's bigger than I can afford, which adds to the pepper," returned Tex absently.

"Pardon a personal reference, but I thought your dad——"

"Oh, dad's loaded pretty well, but as long as I'm young and healthy I figure I ought to be able to snake along by myself. Consequently three thousand lost in this game would break me flat."

"No danger of you losing at draw," replied Berwick with vivid recollections of what the Texan, who had learned poker at the age of eight from his father, was in the habit of doing to the pay-checks of the squadron overseas.

"Listen, Roj; who is this young Peabody?" asked Tex suddenly.

"Why, he's the son of old man Peabody. He owns the Peabody store down-town, as well as some real estate and stuff. Pretty wealthy old codger. The junior there works for his father—assistant manager or something of that kind in the store."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"I don't know him very well—just so-so, I guess. He's been losing a —— of a lot of money up here; I know that—but he always comes back for more. Old man Peabody must be a lot more generous with him than any one gives him credit for. He's a stingy proposition, and the boy has sure gone through a pile of money lately."

"I somehow don't size him up as a very—er—strong character," pursued Tex.

"I can't give you any medals on that estimate," returned Berwick. "A high-school girl who had never been out of Keokuk would know that."

Tex smoked thoughtfully for a moment. In a way, all that Berwick had told him made his suspicions more reasonable, except the prominence of Peabodys' family.

"Roj, I've got my suspicions about that game, and before I make a —— fool of myself, listen in and tell me what you think," he said at length, and then quickly recalled those suspicious hands to Berwick, who had been a continuous observer of the game.

"If what I think is true, it's a whale of a scheme, you see," Tex concluded. "A little signal—under the table probably, because I haven't caught anything else—when Bertrand has a hand, and then everybody stays for Peabody's raise. He would raise no matter what he had. If they're splitting, as I suppose they are, it would be doubly good should Peabody happen to have a good hand on his own hook, just as happened a few minutes ago. Right now Bertrand is two thousand ahead in this game, with the likelihood of being double that amount winner at the end."

Berwick, for once, took time to digest an idea that had the power to shake him out of his blasé attitude toward everything in general.

"Now that you bring those hands back to my memory, they do look suspicious," he admitted finally, his face troubled. "In all but two cases, as I remember it, Peabody laid down without a call, after starting a big hand. He's lost a lot——"

"About one quarter as much as Bertrand has won," Tex interjected.

Berwick nodded.

"Let's talk it over with Brady," he suggested at length. "He's a real good egg, and maybe can give us some dope on Bertrand,"

"Good. But let's not go into detail about what we know about him," said Tex. "It would make little difference anyhow—either he is or isn't cheating, with Peabody's aid, and his past won't alter cases any. If what we suspect is true, Peabody is in rather a mess, I should say."

"It's too bad—I hope to —— it isn't true," returned Berwick. "He isn't much, but then——"

He stopped as Brady came toward them, saving them the trouble of calling him.

"How's the luck running, Mr. MacDowell?" inquired the big man genially.

"Not so bad. I'm a little ahead," replied Tex. "Just laying off for a drink and a smoke."

"Just a minute, Jack," said Berwick as Brady started toward the table.

THE game was going on silently. Even as Berwick called the proprietor back Bertrand hauled in a big pot. From the other game in the adjoining room a sudden burst of subdued laughter penetrated the closed door.

"Jack—as I told you last night—MacDowell here is one of the oldest and best friends I have. And he's a Texas-born poker-player. Anything he says about a game comes pretty near being gospel, to my mind. He's been telling me something he has noticed about that game over there, and we want to talk to you about it, let you watch it, and then use your own judgment."

Brady, his eyes suddenly hard and keen, sat down without a word.

"All right, Mr. MacDowell," he said crisply.

Tex described those particular hands concisely, and gave his reasons for mistrust. Throughout his recital Brady's eyes never left the flyer's face. He himself did not say a word until MacDowell finished. Then—

"If you don't mind, let me handle this," he said evenly.

"Of course, Mr. Brady. I hope you realize my embarrassment in the matter," replied Tex. "As a matter of fact, I simply confided my suspicions to Roj here without much idea of doing anything about it. Being only a temporary guest of yours, I'd have to be —— certain of anything before I raised any ——, and then it would have been through you. For the sake of the other players——"

"I am very glad indeed that you laid the cards on the table," Big Jack assured him, glancing briefly toward the players. "You understand what this is, of course—just a gentleman's club, to all intents and purposes, and I'd rather close up for a month than have anything crooked creep in. Get me?"

Berwick and Tex nodded. They could readily understand that even a hint of cheating in one of Brady's games meant far more to him than to any player in it.

"Bertrand I don't know about," the proprietor went on, as if thinking aloud. "I've known him for years, without really knowing much, y' understand. Always had an idea his business, whatever it was, was sort of peculiar maybe, but ever since I've known him he seemed to be all right. Young Peabody—now that's going to be a chip of a different color."

"Right, Jack. Bertrand, I guess, knows what he's doing if any man ever did, but not Peabody," remarked Berwick.

"Well, I'll get back in the game," said Tex, rising slowly. "From now on it's your party, Mr. Brady."

"And I'll be on the job," Brady said grimly, his heavy face far from pleasant to look at.

MacDowell resumed his seat, and was dealt in the next hand. Brady went into the other room a few moments, and upon his return took a seat a few feet away from the table, a newspaper in his big hands. Berwick had apprized him of MacDowell's belief that, if there were any signals between Bertrand and Peabody, they would be under the table, so Brady sat behind the two suspects.

Within a few moments there came a hand which caused Brady to watch closely.

Tex opened on kings over threes, for fifteen dollars. Both Cairns and Bevins stayed. Bertrand hesitated, and then stayed. Peabody raised the pot eighty-five dollars, causing Cutler to drop. Tex also dropped, but both Cairns and Bevins stayed with it.

"Raising seems to be in style," said Bertrand crisply. "Re-raise three hundred dollars."

Peabody stayed.

Tex stole a look at Brady. The big gambler's eyes were merely slits of light in the fleshy face, and for a fleeting instant he met the flyer's gaze with a barely perceptible nod of the head.

"I am laying down small threes," stated Cairns disgustedly.

Bevins hesitated. The gaunt, homely, perfectly dressed old man was a poker-player, and Tex got the idea that perhaps he too had caught the peculiar coincidence of Bertrand's many re-raises.

"I believe I'll stay," he decided finally, and shoved in his chips.

Cutler, on MacDowell's right, was dealing. Bevins took one card, Bertrand two and Peabody one.

"Check," remarked Bevins calmly before looking at his cards.

"Five hundred," said Bertrand incisively.

"Didn't fill," stated Peabody, and flashed his hand for a moment.

Brady had risen and was standing close to the table. Both he and Tex succeeded in sizing up the youngster's hand, despite the briefness of its exposure. Peabody had drawn to an inside straight. Once again the eyes of the two men met understandingly.

"And five hundred more," came Bevins' unemotional voice at this stage.

MacDowell was watching Peabody, and right there he caught something which provided the final evidence of crookedness, to his mind. Bevins' raise caused a sudden tenseness—one might almost say fear—momentarily to twist his weak face.

Bertrand studied Bevins, whose thin, lined face was without a flicker of expression.

"Raise again—once," he said finally. "As many chips as you have in your stack. About seven hundred, looks like."

Peabody, apparently obeying a sudden impulse which he could not control, leaned over and looked at Bertrand's hand. The quick relief which flooded his face was unmistakable to a close observer.

Three men caught it—MacDowell and Brady, and for once Bevins did also.

"I'm laying down an ace-high flush," he said, and showed it.

"Good poker, Mr. Bevins," Bertrand told him smilingly. "I'll break my rule and show you a queen full, free of charge."

"And now we'll have another showdown that maybe won't be free of charge!"

Silence so sudden that it was packed with drama fell over the table at Brady's words. All eyes rested on his face. The big man glanced around the room quickly, and then without a word went over and closed the door which led toward the kitchen.

He came back to the silent table, standing between Bertrand and Peabody.

"Gentlemen, this thing could have been settled quietly, without either Mr. Cutler, Mr. Bevins or Mr. Cairns knowing anything about it," he said quietly, his narrowed eyes roving from face to face. "However, as you know, I have tried to run a place for gentlemen, y' understand, and I figure it due you all t' know that any crookedness pulled off up here was without my knowledge. Means more to me than it does to you, to tell the truth about it."

In the stress of the moment some of Brady's carefully cultivated veneer came off, and his speech showed a trace of earlier and rougher days. His words caused quick looks to pass between the three older players, and stark fear leaped into Peabody's eyes. He looked quickly at the impassive Bertrand, and then his eyes dropped to the table.

With words that gradually ran closer and closer together as the story proceeded, Brady told the little gathering of men the full story, from the time Tex and Berwick had first told him their suspicions. As he revealed the scheme in all its details, down to the foot-pressing signals he had caught between Bertrand and Peabody underneath the table, his audience was as quiet as death.

Cutler and Cairns, their florid faces troubled, leaned forward as if afraid to miss a word. Tex, legs crossed easily, was smoking as his eyes went from Bertrand to Brady and back again.

Peabody, after the first few sentences, buried his face in his arms and his shoulders shook uncontrollably as the inexorable tale went on, although no sound came from him. Bertrand showed no sign of emotion, but beneath the immobility of his attitude there seemed to be the tense menace of a coiled rattlesnake. His cold gaze never left MacDowell's face. Bevins was impassive.

"There's the deal, gents," concluded Brady, wiping his perspiring face with a huge handkerchief. "I'm tellin' it to you so's you can know where I stand. I pulled a bone in ever letting these two in here. I might of known that this mysterious Bertrand might turn out to be a crook, and that Peabody here didn't have sense enough——"

"Dispense with the insults, Jack," came Bertrand's level voice. "The whole thing is ridiculous; started by a stranger against——"

Peabody lifted his head suddenly, and leaped to his feet. His weak, babylike countenance was working; his eyes were terrible.

"What's the use?" he said shrilly. "It's true, every——"

"Shut up, you —— fool!" barked Bertrand furiously.

Brady's big hand covered his mouth none too gently, and Bertrand subsided into his seat.

"Speak your piece, Peabody," Brady said calmly, the while he transferred both hands to Bertrand's shoulders.

"I'm just a —— fool; worse, a crook," the young fellow said rapidly, brushing his hand across his forehead as if in an endeavor to deliver himself from something that haunted him. "I've been losing too much up here, and—and—I stole five thousand from the store and lost that. This afternoon I ran across Bertrand at the Masterson, and we had some drinks, and I'd been wortying so much about this money that I—I stole—that I told him about it. He suggested this scheme and I came in on it. I was desperate. I——"

He dropped into his chair again, and once more sobs shook his body—audible ones this time. There was something infinitely horrible in the spectacle—only Bertrand seemed unaffected.

For a moment only the sobs broke the silence, and then a sudden hum of conversation from the other room broke the spell. It was Bevins who was the first to speak.

"I guess the cards are all on the table," he stated, his rather harsh voice even and unexcited. "It's ugly, any way you take it, although it is not Brady's fault. I guess we've all felt that Peabody had no business in the game, although shortage of money never entered my head."

Cairns, Cutler and Brady nodded agreement. Peabody, senior, was rated one of the city's wealthiest men.

"My suggestion is this," went on Bevins. "This crooked play has resulted in the combination being nearly four thousand ahead, I guess. Bob, you and John and I can well afford it—suppose we allow Peabody to take these crooked winnings of Bertrand's to replace the money he stole. Jack, you'd better cross off what he owes you, too. You won't miss it. That'll leave only three or four hundred needed to replace the five thousand, and I guess he can get hold of that."

The men addressed nodded slowly.

"I need a sop for my conscience," stated Cairns ruefully. "Brady, if you ever let any more babies in here——"

"Don't worry, Mr. Cairns!" returned Brady emphatically.

Bevins shifted his gaze to Bertrand, who had regained all his *sang froid*.

"As for you, get out, and count yourself lucky!"

The gaunt old man's eyes were suddenly flaming. He dominated the situation.

Bertrand arose without a word. He took his hat, and turned around for just an instant. He looked at Tex briefly. It was long enough to let every man there know, however, that there had been born a hatred which was far from a light thing.

A half-hour later, as Berwick's car carried the two friends toward the center of the city, Roj spoke his thoughts aloud.

"A large night in more ways than one, so far," he said. "An impersonal contest over money has turned into a grudge fight—Bertrand *vs.* MacDowell, Tex."

"Which always means action," returned Tex with a slow grin.

"If a man don't see red to such an extent that he can't see anything else, he's liable to be some dangerous."

"Correct, but sometimes they swing so hard they hit themselves on the rebound," drawled Tex. "Cook Field will tell, I reckon."

He was right.

VII

IT WAS the evening of the second day following that poker game in St. Louis, and Mr. Hobart Bertrand was devoting considerable time to heavy thinking. In his room at the Miami Hotel in Daysville he had been sitting motionless for nearly an hour, striving to gather the loose ends of his struggle with MacDowell and to estimate his slim chances for success in the biggest gamble he had been connected with during a far from monotonous career.

The late Spring twilight was stealing in, and the street lights of Daysville were winking out when there came a quick knock on the door.

"Come in!" barked the room's only occupant. "Hello, Alton. Switch on the light."

The light revealed his visitor as a slight, pimply-faced young man whose striped silk shirt was a little too loud, trousers a trifle too short and coat too ostentatiously form-fitting. His face was very full in comparison with the slightness of his body, and the small eyes and sharp nose gave it an expression of cunning.

"Well, what's the dope?" inquired Bertrand of his recently acquired satellite.

He pushed a box of cigarets across the table, and Alton took one. His hands were large, and the nails showed dark with grime.

"Not so much," he admitted, sending a

huge cloud of smoke into the air. "This MacDowell and his friend meets the sarge—Cary—and right away they all get acquainted with Harvey Harrison, the chief test pilot out at the field. They go in to see the chief, and about an hour afterward go in to see the old man—Colonel Kane, I mean. The chief had sent for the diagrams o' Cary's carbureter, and raised —— when they couldn't be found. There ain't no use of our gettin' excited though—there ain't a breath of suspicion."

"Good," grunted Bertrand, who was resting on the small of his back with his feet on the table.

His eyes rested unwaveringly on his henchman's face.

"As you know, our carbureter has been tested and come through fine. But it ain't got a chance against this Cary thing, or I'm a liar. Someway or another Harrison has fixed it up so MacDowell is gonna test this here carbureter in the air himself instead o' Harrison doin' it."

"He is!"

Sudden interest sparkled in Bertrand's eyes.

"What kind of a test?" he demanded.

"Altitude," rejoined Alton, who was seated on the edge of the table. "They've been runnin' it on the blocks today, but I don't know just how she come out, except that it was —— good. The altitude test'll be what makes the grade for 'em."

"Why?"

"Flyin's gonna be higher and higher all the time," explained Alton, complacent at the opportunity to pose as an authority on something which the dazzling Mr. Bertrand did not know much about.

"In the last war all the combat flyin' was above fifteen thousand feet; in the next one bombers and fighters are gonna be flyin' above twenty thousand all the time, and the side that can get highest is gonna command the air—get me? If you can get five thousand feet higher than the enemy, how the —— are they gonna shoot you down? That's what all this work on superchargers, altitude records, and that stuff is for."

Bertrand leaped to his feet and began pacing the room with long strides.

"Then this test of the carbureter will be made in that specially built, enclosed-cockpit ship, will it not?"

Alton nodded.

"And that means good-by to our junk," he said dully, his dream of riches vanished.

"The —— it does!" Bertrand shot back.

"The —— it don't!" declared Alton.

His customary attitude of intense respect for Bertrand had disappeared with his waning belief that Bertrand could make him rich. He knew of the failure of his chief's mission to McMullen.

"Don't talk so much!"

Alton obeyed Bertrand's instructions to the letter as the promotor continued to walk up and down the room, his head bent in thought. Occasionally he riffled his thick, glossy black hair with his hands. A scheme had leaped into his mind, full formed—but one which caused even him to pause.

"Is there anything to show that we are suspected—I am suspected, I should say—of any crooked work?" he demanded.

"Not a thing, though o' course I ain't in a very good position to tell."

Bertrand realized the truth of Alton's words. However, the more he thought of it, the less it mattered whether MacDowell and Cary had any suspicions about that forged letter he had sent to McMullen. If they did, there was absolutely no way to prove his connection with it. And being the kind of a man he was, he had gradually come to doubt whether the two McMullenites had really got the letter. During the few days he had spent in McMullen, up until the time he had learned of MacDowell's projected trip to St. Louis and Daysville, persistent pumping of Cary had failed to elicit the slightest hint that the letter had been received, and neither MacDowell nor Cary had seemed to suspect him of any crookedness.

Even if they did, they had nothing really "on" him, Bertrand reflected. He cursed that poker game at Brady's savagely. Had it not been for that, his position would have been much more secure.

However, there was a bright side to that, as well.

He did not believe that MacDowell or Berwick would say anything about it at Cook Field for two reasons; one that it would make no difference in deciding about the carbureters, the other that MacDowell, as an officer in the Army, would not care to parade his indulgence in gambling before his superiors.

He had come to Daysville almost without hope of putting anything over on

MacDowell and Cary. What Alton had just said about MacDowell and Cary conducting the first air-test, however, opened up an avenue which seemed to lead to certain success—but it meant cold-blooded murder.

Minute after minute Bertrand paced the floor silently. It meant delving more deeply into crime than he had ever delved before, and the stake was big. Perhaps he might have decided to go through with it anyhow—but certain it was that the thing which finally made him decide to carry his scheme to a grim conclusion was the rankling thought of that game at Brady's.

He was of the breed which unconsciously considers the rest of humankind as coming under the unlovely but vivid heading of "suckers;" himself as one of the few "wise ones." More affecting to him than the loss of the money in St. Louis was the fact that this lounging, soft-spoken flyer from the backwoods of Texas had beaten him at his own game. The humiliation of his exposure, and all its unpleasant consequences, he laid at MacDowell's door, and there had been born in his heart a hatred for the man who had thus far balked him at every turn.

The greatness of the reward, plus his vindictive desire to even things with Tex, decided him.

"Alton, we're going to win as sure as you're a foot high, if my memory serves me correctly about this test ship," he said evenly as he resumed his chair. "Listen, and tell me whether I'm wrong."

His restlessness had passed with his sudden determination to stake everything on a single throw. His face was pallid and expressionless.

During the weeks he had been working on this carbureter deal he had been continuously picking up all the diversified information about aviation that he could. Even Alton was surprized as his chief put the questions to him.

"The cockpit of this ship is completely enclosed—air tight when the side doors are shut?"

Alton nodded.

"There is an air-pump, worked by a small propeller on the side of the ship, which keeps the air pressure in the cockpit at sea-level pressure?"

Again Alton nodded wonderingly. He had no idea what Bertrand was getting at.

"When the pressure gets too high a petcock at the top lets air escape until it is back to normal, does it not?"

"Right. The object of all that is to make this altitude testin' comfortable, y' see. It——"

"I know. Alton, we've got MacDowell and Cary cold if they test that contraption of theirs!"

"Well, they're gonna test it day after tomorrow; but what good does it do us?"

Bertrand, standing close to the mechanic with his eyes boring into the shifty ones before him, explained his scheme in a few words. Alton's face blanched.

"Good ——, it'd be murder! I——"

"Of course; but it means millions, you poor fool. And there won't be the slightest chance of your being caught; you can do the thing in ten seconds tomorrow. As a regular mechanic, in the power-plant department——"

"I won't do it——"

"Don't be a piker—and don't forget that you've already stolen confidential plans belonging to the Government, and that I can have you put away for ten years. Of all the jelly-livered nincompoops I ever saw, you're the worst. Why, where are you now? A —— thief, a forty-dollar-a-week mechanic, and you yammer around like a muling and puking baby when some one gives you a chance to bring home the bacon!"

A sneer was on Bertrand's thin, cleanly chiseled lips as he watched the squirming victim on his hook. He had picked up Alton as a means of getting confidential information from the inside, and through judicious association and spending of money had finally got him completely under his thumb. For a moment nothing was said, as Alton stared white faced at the floor.

Then, with his instinct for doing the right thing at the right time, Bertrand cast off the hard, contemptuous attitude he had taken to say:

"Come on, Alton, old top. Here's a chance for us to clean up the biggest thing in years, at no risk. We've gone too far to back out—we're both criminals now, and another little job won't hurt us any. Not with a lifetime of money-spending ahead of us."

He played skilfully on Alton's inordinate cupidity, with occasional subtle references that reminded the Cook Field man that his position was very precarious as a result of his other acts at Bertrand's request.

"I—I'll do it, I guess," he muttered finally, lighting a cigaret with shaking hands.

"That's the boy. The Lord hates a piker. See what it'll do for us?"

"Why—er——"

"Look here. MacDowell and Cary, the only two men who know anything much about the carbureter, will be killed in an airplane crash that nobody on earth will be able to explain. The only model of their carbureter in existence will be completely demolished, probably. I step in with a forged bill of sale from MacDowell and Cary showing that the night before they were killed—tomorrow night—they sold me the rights in their carbureter for fifty thousand dollars.

"I will see to it that I see Cary and MacDowell alone a few minutes in one of their rooms tomorrow, and I'll plant a certified check for fifty thousand in MacDowell's room as soon as they're killed to back up the story. I'll have my trip to McMullen for confirmation that I've been after them. There won't be a soul that can prove anything crooked about the deal—not unless I've lost my power to handle a pen. That will mean the carbureter is ours, complete. Get me?"

Alton nodded slowly. The plan seemed to be feasible. Certain it was that the method Bertrand's agile brain had figured out to kill the two airmen was satanic in its sublety and effectiveness; there was no possible way the mechanic could figure for the passengers in that ill-fated test ship to escape. Given their death, there was no reason why a forged bill of sale, with fifty thousand dollars to back it up, should not hold. Who would there be to gainsay its genuineness?

"Where does Peck come in on this?" inquired Alton at length.

"Nowhere. He's visiting his folks in North Dakota at my expense, just to get him out of the way. He's due back day after tomorrow. All he knows about all this business is that you're a confidential representative of mine at the field—he hasn't the least idea that there is such a thing as a Cary carbureter. He won't be declared in at all. It's yours and mine and John Dorak's, with fifteen per cent. split for you instead of a five. Get me?"

Alton's last scruples vanished. The careful destruction of his moral fiber was completed under Bertrand's experienced hands. He was blind to everything but the blissful prospect of money to burn in the future.

For a half-hour more they discussed the details of what Alton was to do. All that he would be called on for was ten seconds' work—it could be accomplished at almost any moment during the day, for there would be nothing suspicious in his being around the ship for a moment.

"You and I haven't been seen together at all—I've had that in mind all along—except in Columbus or some other city," Bertrand reminded him. "Consequently, even if by any chance they are suspecting me a little on account of my trip to McMullen, I'll have a clear alibi, and you won't be concerned. The chances are a million to one against suspicion of any kind—it will look for all the world like a crash due to the pilot's bad judgment."

"Oh, it's a —— keen scheme," agreed Alton as he went out.

The last of a continuous series of cigarets was in his loose mouth, and his hands were not steady, but there was no thought of wavering in his mind.

Once again Bertrand began pacing the floor.

"Let's see," he mused swiftly. "A wire to John for the money, fixing up those papers, and then arranging for a private meeting for a few moments with MacDowell and Cary, alone. I'll get that in the evidence by notifying the hotel clerk, when I see them, that I can be called in MacDowell's room. Berwick will be forced to testify that I saw them privately, too, if he's around at the time."

He went over and over his plans, trying to weigh them impartially. There was the annoying possibility of a certain amount of suspicion of him already in the two airmen's minds, and in addition that cursed poker game. However, even granting that they did have some idea of a part of his crookedness in the matter, they would be dead and no one else would know.

He had got away clean on the attempted theft of the model at the Masterson in St. Louis—there was no proof, either, of his connection with stealing the plans of the carbureter at Cook Field, or that forged letter; and in the unlikely event of the game at Brady's being noised around against him, it would really have no bearing on the matter. Besides, Berwick would not reveal the

existence of Brady's place for any but the most vitally important reason.

All in all, it was the most desperate undertaking he had ever been involved in, but far from the most hazardous from the viewpoint of probable success.

"I guess this smart-Aleck, MacDowell, won't be flapping his wings and crowing so much when I get through with him," Bertrand told himself exultantly as he prepared to go out and start his preparations.

His thin face grew ugly as he thought again of the way MacDowell had checkmated him up at Brady's. For once he had been under dog, and the experience was far from a pleasant one.

Probably he would never be able to think of it without a combination of rage and shame, but so complete a revenge would go far toward erasing the memory and redeeming himself in his own eyes.

Immaculate from hair to shoes, he let himself out of the room, and took the elevator down to the crowded lobby. He swung his cane idly as he walked through to the street doors. Once again he was riding on top of the wave, and the world was his oyster.

VIII

MacDOWELL, Cary, Berwick and First Lieutenant Harvey Harrison were sitting on the ground with their backs against a hangar wall. Cook Field, the experimental base for the Army Air Service, spread flat and green before them. On the side of the field opposite the long row of huge white hangars was a continuous, curving line of trees, marking the course of the river which wound along the southern edge of the field.

The thriving city of Daysville practically surrounded the field—the center of it was less than a half-mile from the river. Tall buildings, their windows flashing in the rays of the sun, seemed only a step from where the airmen were sitting.

Out on the line, a few paces in front of the hangars, busy mechanics were adjusting the instruments which would be carried on the altitude flight. Most important of these was the recording barograph—an altimeter, sealed, which by means of a pen recorded in graphic form the climb of the ship, as well as the maximum altitude attained.

When the ship came down, the Cook Field engineers would be able to tell how quickly the climb had been made, the speed of the ship at its maximum altitude, and the amount of gas consumed. Later on exhaustive tests taking many hours of flying would be made for final data.

A great variety of ships was lined up along with the altitude ship which Tex and Cary would take up, and more types were droning above the field. Monoplanes, so tiny that they looked like flies, nestled close to the huge, ten-ton, three-motored triplane which, armored heavily and carrying eleven guns, was designed for trench-strafing and ground-attack work.

Twin-motored bombers, new types of observation and scout planes—all the new ships on which experiments were being conducted—were there, and to the men from Texas provided a continual source of interest. A swarm of mechanics, mostly civilians, thronged the line. Ships were constantly going out on all kinds of tests.

Over on the end of the line a De Haviland taxied out carrying folded parachutes loaded with heavy weights, and equipped with time fuses so that they would open after five hundred and thousand feet drops, to test the amount of strain they would stand. There were ships which went up day after day, with the same pilot and the same spark-plugs, to find out how long a certain type of plug would stand up. Other ships were going up on their first flights with new equipment.

"I sure would like to be stationed here a while and try out some of these funny ships," Tex remarked.

"Stick around a few days and we'll give you a shot at some of them," returned Harrison.

He was a big, curly-haired fellow who wore glasses most of the time. He looked like a rising young business man, and was conceded to be the best big-ship pilot in the country.

An instant liking had sprung up between Tex and the test pilot, compounded of mutual respect for each other's records as flyers and a strong personal attraction. They were alike in many things.

Tex had taken Harrison into his confidence regarding Bertrand's machinations, and at Harrison's suggestion they had also told the whole story to Colonel Kane, in command of the field, and the chief engineer. The authorities were simply waiting for Bertrand to involve himself and his

associates more deeply, but during the three days which had elapsed since the arrival of the men from McMullen the promotor had not been in evidence, and thus had escaped the net which was spread to catch him as soon as he finally committed himself.

It was due mainly to Harrison's efforts that to Tex and Cary had been given the unusual honor of conducting the first air tests on their carbureter. As the little group awaited word from the mechanics that the ship was in readiness, Colonel Kane and Merriam, the chief engineer, came out on the line. The new carbureter and its apparent possibilities were the sensation of of the field right then, and a distinguished audience would watch the test.

"They're ready," said Harrison, coming to his feet.

The others got up, Tex and Cary adjusting their helmets. Berwick stretched lazily.

"Here I come all the way to Daysville to get in on some melodrama—the stealing of the plans and the foiling of the villain—and not a dastardly hiss or a murder has come along. Ain't that ——?" he complained. "Now all I see is a long, monotonous flight, and then everything's over."

"Tough luck, Roj," grinned Tex.

"Looks like the competition was over," agreed Harrison as they walked toward the ship, surrounded by a little knot of curious flyers and mechanics.

"This bird Peck hasn't shown up yet, has he?" inquired Tex.

"Due back today. He's just a big, rough bird—ex-mechanic, as I told you. I don't believe he's the important man," returned Harrison. "I guess the other crowd have given up, though. We haven't caught a thing."

"I know it," said Tex, a trace of regret in his voice.

"Well, good luck," chorused Harrison and Berwick as the two border men made their way through the crowd.

They were apparently objects of interest to every one, for many curious eyes followed the tall, loose figure of MacDowell as he quickly inspected the ship with Cary. His reputation as a flyer had gone far and wide through the Air Service as a result of a continuous series of unusual happenings down on the Rio Grande, and in addition there was the underlying thought of how revolutionary the coming test might be for the future of flying.

Satisfied with their inspection, they climbed in the side doors of the ship. As they did so, a pimply faced mechanic in the back ground threw away a half-smoked cigaret, only to light another one with hands that shook so he could barely get his light.

The remodeled De Haviland was so arranged that both men sat side by side. The cockpit was completely enclosed, and when the side doors were shut was air-tight. Each door contained a small window of heavy glass, and there was likewise a small window in the front looking out over the motor. A small propeller, a few inches long, set alongside the fuselage, would turn in the air stream generated by the ship's speed and work a compressed-air pump.

When the ship got high enough so that the coldness of the air, or its thinness, became uncomfortable, the doors could be closed, and immediately the cockpit would approximate the condition of the air close to the ground. A safety valve in the top of the cockpit was so regulated that when the pressure got too high it was automatically lessened.

Tex turned on the throttle for a moment, and both he and Cary nodded as the big four-hundred-horse-power Liberty roared along evenly. Sixteen hundred revolutions a minute showed on the tachometer. That would mean about seventeen-fifty in the air. Air pressure stood at four pounds, and the oil crept up to thirty. The pilot turned off each switch momentarily, and there was no diminution of r. p. m., and not a sign of a miss.

He stuck his head out of the door on his side, and motioned to the waiting mechanics. They jerked away the blocks, and he fed the throttle slowly to taxi out for the take-off. Both he and Cary leaned out on their respective sides to see better. Due to the enclosed cockpit there were a lot of blind angles in the ship.

Both airmen could not but feel a certain tenseness as the pilot shoved the throttle full on for the take-off. It would be the first time their carbureter had taken the air.

The steady drum of the motor was heartening, and as the tail came up in response to slow pressure on the stick the ship flashed past the crowded line and in a few seconds was in the air. Nearly eighteen hundred revolutions showed on the tachometer, and Tex pulled back sharply. The

big ship zoomed effortlessly—and not until the altimeter showed five hundred feet was it necessary to level out to save flying speed, and even then the motor had not faltered at all in the killing climb.

In ever widening circles the De Haviland drove steadily upward. During the first eight thousand feet both Cary and MacDowell stuck their heads out of the side doors constantly, to watch for other ships. When the last of them had been left below they settled back in the protected cockpit, removed their helmets and goggles, now unnecessary, and gave their full attention to the action of the motor.

And little by little their exultation grew. Cary's long, homely face was almost transfigured as the altimeter crept up faster than he ever had seen it rise in a De Haviland—ten thousand feet in eight minutes was not to be despised. And their one carbureter was working as smoothly as the two big double contraptions which had been used for Liberty motors heretofore. They both knew that the gas consumption would be much less—that in addition to the greater safety and economy of their invention it was actually more effective from the standpoint of revolutions per minute than the old type.

At fifteen thousand feet the clear, golden air was chill. The r. p. m. of the motor dropped a hundred revolutions, but a slight adjustment of the altitude throttle to compensate for the thinness of the air made the tachometer needle jump back to fifteen hundred again without use of the regular throttle.

"Better close the doors, I guess," yelled Tex to Cary, and the mechanic nodded.

The doors, which opened inward, were closed and the clasp-bar put in place. Immediately, almost, the change in the air was evident. Their bodies warmed it in the small enclosed cockpit, and the change in pressure, accurately shown by the fact that it was unnecessary to keep blowing out their ears, was very evident.

At eighteen thousand feet Tex began to grow slightly uncomfortable. It seemed unbearably stuffy, and there was an uncomfortable sensation of pressure. However, he gave it little thought. There was nothing to do but sit back, and keep the ship on its climb by sighting on the horizon through the small window in front.

They were so high that the ground beneath them for perhaps fifty square miles could not be seen. Their angle of vision through the small windows in front and on the sides was such that it was impossible to see anything below for a considerable distance.

At twenty thousand feet further adjustment of the altitude lever was necessary. Oil, air and voltmeter gages were all satisfactory. Tex was perspiring continuously, as was Cary. Not only that, but that sense of terrific pressure was growing more and more uncomfortable.

Tex had an uneasy sense that something was wrong, and in a few seconds was sure of it. The ship's rate of climb was growing slower and slower in the thinning air, as was natural; but as he watched the altimeter he was aware of nausea. He felt as if he was not getting enough air to breathe, and all the time the buzzing in his ears and that sense of an invisible jacket ever pressing against his body increased with force which grew more and more cruel.

He looked at Cary. The lantern-jawed mechanic's eyes were almost panic-stricken. He was breathing in labored gasps, the sweat streaming from his leathery face.

Like a flash MacDowell, fighting off the deadly nausea and faintness, saw the reason for their plight. The safety-valve was not working—that must be the explanation. The air-pump on the side was increasing the pressure all the while—the air could not get out and in addition the atmosphere of the small cockpit, now completely air-tight, undoubtedly was growing more and more foul with the rebreathed air of two men.

They were twenty-one thousand feet high—four miles above the earth. Striving to keep hold of himself and avoid letting himself be overcome by the now painful pressure and the foul air, Tex crashed his right fist against the glass pane of the door. He knew it would be impossible to open it against that terrific pressure within.

Time after time he used all his strength in trying to break the glass, but it was so heavy that his raw and bleeding fist made no impression on it. Cary was trying wildly to smash the pane on his side. Finally he loosened his belt and with the uncontrollable wildness of panic he clawed and battered the thick glass with crimsoned fists.

Tex looked around the tiny cockpit desperately. There was not a tool or other possible instrument which might break the

glass. Outside the deadly trap which held them a calm, blue sky shone peacefully, and golden sunlight bathed the ship in rays that came through the windows and speckled the floor with alternate light and shade.

Just one dim hope there was, but even that came into the pilot's mind with scarce force enough to influence him, for despite himself he was yielding to the physical faintness which, added to the hopelessness of their plight, was overcoming him.

It was Cary who unwittingly helped bring him to himself. There was madness in the deep-set eyes of the mechanic as he turned toward Tex. Careless of the controls, the big fellow started to climb wildly across MacDowell's knees, clawing at the sides, the roof, anything.

Tex was quick to see that Cary had gone amuck. Without hesitation he drew back his arm, and as Cary turned toward him with clawing fingers he smashed straight and true for the side of the jaw. He was cramped in the blow, but in Cary's weakened condition it was enough. He crumpled on the flyer, and with a lunge Tex put his big body back in its seat, where it slumped limply, but was out of the way.

Slowly the tortured pilot brought the nose up with a slow pressure on the stick. He cut the motor slowly, leaving it at eight hundred revolutions. That, he figured, would be the minimum at which he could keep the nose high in the air and stall down.

His object was to reduce the speed of the ship to such a degree that the propeller air-pump would not keep feeding that compressed air into the cockpit so fast. He felt that it would take but very little more air to blow up the cockpit entirely—that would mean certain death.

If he could fight off unconsciousness for a few more minutes, stall the ship almost straight down to the field—there was a chance they might live. Otherwise there would be a straight dash earthward for four miles. Even a slow glide—seventy-five miles an hour—would be fatal. If the foul air overcame him, of course there would be nothing but death ahead—either in the air or in the inevitable crash.

With all his strength, physical and mental, he strove to accomplish that most difficult of flying feats—keeping a ship level without flying speed. Hunched over his stick, with feet locked on the rudder bar, he was using all the skill and knowledge of five years of flying to anticipate a dipping wing or the sudden trembling that heralded a nose-dive unless by gentle forward pressure he allowed the ship to pick up a few extra miles of speed.

The altimeter crawled down slowly to ten thousand feet, and Tex had bitten his lips so cruelly in the effort to keep all his faculties that his chin was only a crimson smear. He felt as if losing control of the ship for even a few seconds would mean the end. He knew that he could not stand the sudden increase in pressure which the racing ship would generate.

At five thousand feet he was breathing in labored gasps—his eyes seemed to be popping out of his head and his ears tortured him.

Then there came into his reeling brain a thought which for an instant tempted him to give up the struggle. A quick glimpse out of the window warned him that Cook Field was not beneath him—that he was stalling down over the city itself. He could not see straight down, but only the fringe of the city was discernible—the center of it must be beneath him. Gathering himself together, he put the ship in a sideslip, so that the left side window was momentarily beneath him and he could see directly below him. With a great gasp of relief he glimpsed the winding river, and just an end of the field.

He risked a quick stab at the throttle to carry him over the field. Then for a full minute he forgot everything except that crazily undulating horizon which he could see through the front window, and the necessity of keeping his ship level. He did not know why he was doing it—he was totally unconscious of the limp body of Cary, now curled grotesquely on the floor.

He felt as if he had been stalling down for ages. The feat which he had done a thousand times for pure joy in his uncanny mastery of a ship he was now doing for his life, but right then he did not realize it.

A terrific crash—and up through the floor came one of the landing-gear struts. For a few seconds smashed struts and bits of propeller were showering around him. Dim figures were rushing toward him over the field. There was a blessed relief as a window smashed. How it broke he never knew whether it was the force of the crash or a bit of flying debris.

Then came all the agony of the "bends"—those rending contortions which come from a sudden difference in pressure, known and dreaded wherever men work under artificial atmospheric conditions. MacDowell was unconscious of what he had just done, or of the desperately working men around him—his world was one of infinite pain.

IX

THE man who finally brought the matter to an end was Mr. William Peck, ex-mechanic and inventor of the Peck carbureter.

Roj Berwick, knowing nothing of the plug in the safety valve which had been found a half-hour after the crash, wasted no time. That crash might have been the result of accident, but he doubted it.

As soon as he knew that MacDowell was in no danger of losing his life he was on his way to Daysville. His thin, intellectual face was set, and his lazy eyes hard with resolution. Bertrand might have had nothing to do with it, but if he had, he would have no chance to escape.

Before the dazed promoter knew what was happening he was securely bound and gagged in his own room at the Miami Hotel. A little telephone work to the field brought the C. O's authority to have two secret-service men come to the hotel and place Bertrand under arrest on suspicion.

Using what evidence of his crookedness they already had, Colonel Kane himself and the secret-service men tried to bluff Bertrand into admitting his connection with the plugging of the safety valve. He would say nothing, hoping desperately that nothing would happen to show his connection with Alton.

Perhaps the proof might have fallen down, if Peck had not arrived from his visit home. Secret-service men were waiting for him, and in ten minutes after his arrival at the field he was under arrest, and standing before Colonel Kane.

Once again the evidence was gone over in the effort to secure a confession, but Peck's dumfounded wonder at the whole tale convinced even the operatives. The big, rugged mechanic knew nothing of the fact that a Cary carbureter existed, and proceeded to convince every one, from Berwick and Harrison to Colonel Kane, that he had no connection with Bertrand's plot. He told a straight-forward story of his relationship with Bertrand, and then asked—

"How about Alton?"

"Alton! What do you mean?"

It was Nunmaker, one of the secret-service men, who snapped that question.

Peck told them what he knew of Alton's connection with Bertrand, which as far as he knew was a reasonably innocent one; but it was enough.

"I believe he's the key," stated Nunmaker. "Unless he's as good as Bertrand—which he must be a wonder if he is—we'll get all the dope out of him. It takes a —— good man to avoid giving himself away when confronted with sudden evidence which surprizes him. Will you let me handle this, colonel?"

The colonel would. In five minutes Alton, shifty-eyed and in a state of almost complete collapse, was standing before his inquisitors. As Nunmaker's reconstruction of the story went on in the sleuth's matter-of-fact voice, every man there knew instinctively that the loose ends of the whole conspiracy were in their hands.

"And then," concluded Nunmaker with a sudden lunge forward at the shrinking Alton, "you plugged that safety valve at Bertrand's command. We've got the goods on you cold. You've been in his employ—stolen, and tried to murder. Your only hope of evading the electric chair is to come clean with a confession that will provide us with the means of convicting Bertrand without long and expensive gathering of legal evidence. It's your hide, Alton!"

And Alton knew it. The fundamental weakness of the man was such that much less than the evidence which confronted him would have been sufficient to insure his turning State's evidence. When he left the colonel's office on his way to jail a complete confession was in black and white on the colonel's desk. The fifty-thousand-dollar check and the false bill of sale were found to corroborate Alton's story.

Berwick brought Peck over to the hospital to see MacDowell and Cary, who were still weak and sick. As Roj outlined the recent developments in the case Tex looked over at Cary with the old smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"Strikes me, Cary, that this Peck has had kind of a rum deal all around," he stated, his glance at Peck taking in the

frank, troubled face of the big mechanic and his palpable sorrow over the ramifications of the recent struggle.

Cary nodded.

"Peck, you've done us a —— good turn, and you look to me like a good man. One that knows carbureters, too. I've got around ten per cent. in the Cary carbureter—five of it is yours if you want to throw in with us. I figure Cary's going to be a pretty busy manufacturer pretty soon now, and men like you are what we want. What say?"

As the overwhelmed Peck strove to say something Cary added his bit.

"You'll be worth a lot to us, Peck. I've got no right to ninety per cent. of the invention—the lieutenant here won't take no more than ten per cent., and now he's givin' half o' that away. There's another five per cent. waitin' for you if you want to start right now. Lieutenant MacDowell's father is goin' to put up the money. What we'll need is good men. If you'd rather have a salary——"

"You fellows are sure white men," stammered Peck, twisting his hat in his gnarled hands. "I—I——"

"Well, that settles that," grinned the flyer. "Ten per cent., and your services ours. They tell me there's no doubt that our carbureter will be officially adopted, so when I get my health again—about to-morrow, I guess—we'll get down to brass tacks."

"The way you boys do business when you're sick makes me wonder what you'll do when you're full of pep," stated Berwick languidly. "Let's go, Peck, and let 'em sleep, now that everybody's happy."

"Except Bertrand," drawled Tex.

FIRST WHITES TO HOOF FROM NICARAGUA TO CAPE BRETON

by **H. P.**

WHEN Sir John Hawkins left Merrie England in 1568 to collect toll from the Spanish settlements in Central America he was beginning to weave a bit of historical mystery which has never been definitely solved. Sir John had no intention of contributing enigmas for lovers of antiquities to mull over, but when he put ashore some of his crew within what is now the bounds of Nicaragua he started the ball a-rolling, and in these modern times students of early American history would give much to know if Sir John's sailors were among the first, or possibly *the* first, white men to visit the Ohio River and traverse its valley.

For it is a remarkable and historical fact that with bulldog grit the marooned sailors promptly started afoot on a tramp which took them across the North American continent, across burning plains, mighty mountains, through nations of Indians. Their start is known; their finish at a point within half a hundred miles of Cape Breton, where they were picked up by a French fishing-vessel and taken to England, is known. Their amazing story was told to Queen Elizabeth's Lord of the Admiralty, or whatever his title was; and the fact remained that they were dumped ashore in Central America and bobbed up serenely on Cape Breton Island, their eyes hungry for Old England, their faces turned to the east.

One would naturally expect the sailors would have described their course with enough exactness to show whether they came through the Ohio Valley or not. Such is not the case. Fleeing from Indians who pursued; hiding from others that they might not be discovered, they crossed the continent, and, on emerging, leave all but the beginning and finish of their journey a blank.

They tarried long enough with some of the Eastern Indians to learn the native word for the Crystal Mountain as Mount Washington was called by the aborigines. They then progressed north and learned the native term for what is now Montreal, also the name of the Saguenay River. These were the only Indian names they gave which have been identified. But it is unknown whether they struck some western tributary of the Mississippi and followed it down to its junction with the Mississippi, then made their way to the mouth of the Ohio, or whether they crossed the Mississippi far south and followed up the eastern coast.

The Camp Robber

by ERNEST BERTELSON

"KSA WEE HA HA! Ka wee ha ha!" A saucy slate-colored jay hopped excitedly about on the roof of a little cabin and shrieked derisively at two men as they packed their long Yukon sleigh. For several months he had scolded and cursed these men; he had spied upon them and stolen from them; he had even teased their dogs by pecking at their fish and skipping about just beyond the length of their chains. And now he had at last succeeded in driving them away. He knew they were not coming back, for he was a wise old jay; many was the camp he had broken up by his vile abuse. With vast impudence he bustled down to take a last peck at some moose-meat exposed on the sleigh.

"Get out, Jack! Ye'll be packing the sled away next," exclaimed one of the men as he threw a canvas over the load.

His partner smiled.

"That's the noisiest camp robber I've see'd in the thirty year I been in the country. Listen to him chatter."

Jack was back up on the roof and the frosty air vibrated with the torrent of his maledictions.

The two men bound the last loop over the sleigh and then slowly straightened up. They were prospectors of the old type. Every man on the Yukon has heard of "Hard Luck" Bill and "Skagway" Jim. Even before the Dawson strike these two intrepid searchers had fought their way over remote trails through the Tanana Valley and into the Koyokuk.

But Bill had been cursed with ill fortune. Time after time he had mushed in at the head of a stampede and staked, only to find that the pay-streak pinched out just at the edges of his claim. Privation and care had bent his huge frame and furrowed his kindly old face. His spirit was still strong. Each Winter found him out in the hills at the bottom of a prospect hole; but he was growing old. There was no getting away from it, Bill was nearing the end of his trail.

His partner, Jim, was a twisted little man of about sixty. His thin wistful face, flanked on either side by enormous ears, expressed impulsive generosity. Jim had made his twice—once at Dawson and later at Fairbanks. Each time his liberality had quickly emptied his poke and sent him forth once more to grope under the frozen tundra for new wealth.

This morning they were returning down the Porcupine River, over the ice, to Fort Yukon two hundred miles south. For months they had starved and burrowed in the frozen depths of a creek bottom, hoping to strike pay before their scanty supply of beans and flour gave out. But the tenacious bed-rock had yielded nothing but colors, luring promises, but no rewards. It was December. Five more months of Winter remained. They would have to rustle another grub-stake at Fort Yukon.

"Have we forgot anything, Bill?"

"No. Nothin' but the stove and that ain't worth packin'."

The dogs shifted impatiently. Bill turned and loosened the snubline. The team

lunged forward with the sleigh down the steep slope and out upon the broad white surface of the river.

"Ka wee ha ha!" screamed the jay triumphantly as the party disappeared through the arctic gloom.

The morning was bitter cold. Over the river there hung an icy haze that obscured the distant shore-line. The deathly silence of the frost-impregnated atmosphere was jarred by the occasional crack of a frozen willow. Sinister hisses followed the sweep of snow-shoes casting aside gritty snow. As the men ran they breathed carefully, always through the porcupine fur which fringed their parka hoods.

"She must be sixty below," muttered Jim who was breaking trail ahead of the dogs.

Jagged ice chunks buried beneath a thin blanket of snow made the going rough. When the final cold snap had settled over the land the Porcupine, which flows south out of the Arctic, had been choked with huge ice cakes. These the swift current had jumbled into great jagged heaps forming sharp points and edges over which the heavy sleigh lurched and slewed throwing Bill violently about as he clung to the handles to keep the load from overturning.

They had gone down the river about five miles when suddenly Jim swerved to the right off his course and began to study the snow.

Bill ground the sharp brake teeth into the ice.

"What is it, Jim, a moose?"

"Two of 'em. An old un and a yearlin'. It ain't bin a half-hour since they passed."

Bill came forward and surveyed the sweeping tracks which crossed diagonally over their trail.

"They're in a bunch o' willers on thet island," he said in a low voice, pointing toward a distant low-lying shadow barely discernible through the haze.

Jim nodded.

"I'll cut over and come down through the brush and you head over toward the lower end 'n git 'em if I jump 'em before I git a chancet ter shoot."

He ran back to the sleigh and picked up his .30-30. He threw back the lever to satisfy himself that there was a cartridge in the barrel and then proceeded cautiously swiftly over the trail left by the two moose.

Bill and the dogs were already moving across toward the lower end.

The tracks led a straight course into the dark tangle of stunted spruce and willows that matted the island. Under the dense growth frozen niggerheads thrust up their round slippery tops in such profusion that Jim was obliged to untie his snow-shoes and carry them under his arm. He had eased through the thicket but a short distance, when the trail disappeared in a confusion of other moose and caribou tracks. The island was evidently a favorite feeding-place for game. For several feet above the ground every tender twig had been nipped by the hungry animals.

In the dim twilight of the brush all life seemed to have vanished. All noises seemed to have been frozen to silence. Parting the stiff branches carefully Jim entered a yet denser clump of spruce. With a sudden whirr a covey of willow grouse rose and swept through the thick brush, their wings beating a loud roar until they alighted a hundred yards further on. Then silence.

"——," muttered Jim as he shifted his course so as not to raise them again.

He had paused to untangle one of his snow-shoes from a sharp twig.

What was that?

Through the deep hush had cut a distant scream.

With an impatient jerk of apprehension, Jim released his snow-shoes and listened.

Once more between the gloomy maze of branches sifted the agonizing cry.

"My God, it's Bill," he cried.

Gasping with anxiety and fear he turned and ran toward the edge of the island. The trees seemed to have grown into an impenetrable hedge over acres of frozen bumps. Spruce-trees studded with stiff twigs obstructed his way, ripping his parka and face as he stumbled and tore through the brush. At last he reached the beach and looked down-river.

A small point prevented a view of the lower end of the island. Without waiting to put on his snow-shoes he ran down the beach, panting and choking for breath in the cold air. Boulders and sharp rocks, concealed under loose snow, bruised and cut his moccasined feet. He was dizzy with exhaustion as he rounded the point and his old legs shook and trembled from exertion.

Dimly through the twilight he saw the end of the island and the barren white sheet beyond.

Bill and the sleigh had vanished.

"Bill—Bill," he shouted frantically.

"Here, Jim—quick—qui—," came a feeble cry from the river.

Jim turned and stumbled out over the rough surface.

The sleigh-tracks led up over a sloping ledge of ice and ended abruptly at a dark hole in which the swift current of the river sucked and gurgled.

Old Bill, his hair and beard a mass of ice, was clinging to a sharp point of a cake at the edge of the hole, his shoulders and body submerged in the icy water.

"Here, Bill, grab the gun," gasped Jim extending his rifle as he crawled cautiously to the edge of the hole.

"I can't, Jim," he chattered, "my mitts is froze to the ice."

Jim swore softly and fumbled for his knife. He crept close to cut the mittens. The heavy moose-hide was like steel. Several moments passed before Bill's hands were loosened. Had not Jim clutched his wrists he would have slipped back into the hole.

Pulling carefully Jim managed to get him up on the treacherous fringe that surrounded the opening.

"Let me pack you. We got to git over and start a fire."

Numbed by the icy water and by the intense cold that already had stiffened his clothing, Bill could hardly stir; but at last Jim managed to get him astride his bent little back and started for shore fortunately but a few yards distant. Twice, staggering under his heavy burden, he slipped and fell on the jagged cakes. Each time he rose groaning and resumed his course.

Finally he reached the dense willow-thicket that fringed the beach and sank panting upon the snow. He knew that every second counted if Bill was to live, but his muscles seemed paralyzed. With an extreme heart-breaking effort he rose and gathered some of the many dry willows about him and placed them over a bundle of birch-bark that he drew from his parka. From his cap he took a small block of sulfur matches and ignited the bark. The resinous little strips sputtered and flared up and in turn set fire to the twigs. Soon the flames began to beat back the encircling fringe of frost.

Revived somewhat by his success he rolled Bill close to the fire and heaped on larger branches until a big blaze threw out its glow of warmth and life. From the spruce-growth farther back he gathered a huge armful of boughs which he spread over the snow.

Slowly Bill was recovering from the shock of his terrible exposure, but his hands were yet too numb to unfasten his clothing.

"She was a close one, wasn't she, Bill?" remarked Jim as he stooped to unfasten Bill's moccasins. "How come the ice was so rotten—a warm Spring?"

"Y-yes," chattered Bill, "the sled broke through and went down like a rock." He paused and coughed painfully. "My lungs got full o' water," he explained. "It drug the dogs with it—the whole outfit's gone. How many matches you got? I lost mine with my cap."

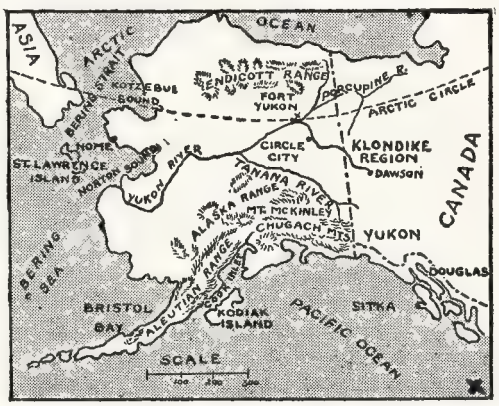
Jim started slightly.

"Oh quite a few," he lied, "we'll make her easy. I got my gun and they's a little flour left in the cabin. We'll go back 'n rest up a bit and start down tomorrer."

Jim heaped more wood on the fire and as he relieved Bill of his sodden clothing he propped each garment on a stick close to the blaze.

Hours passed before Bill could start back to the cabin and the dim twilight had deepened into the darkness of the early arctic night when they left the island.

In spite of years of privations and solitude a deep despondency oppressed them.



Each knew that they were in a terrible predicament. Far to the south lay Fort Yukon, the closest human habitation, separated from them by two hundred miles of frozen wilderness. Even with a dog-team and supplies it was a difficult mush; but to reach there in mid-Winter without robes,

provisions and only one pair of snow-shoes would mean terrible hardships, long days of grinding over heart-breaking trails, cold nights of shivering beside fitful fires, and weeks of hunger, perhaps starvation if game could not be found.

Several times as they faced the bitter wind blowing down-river Bill was seized with violent spasms of coughing.

Jim tried to cheer him up by words of encouragement, but his own heart was so filled with misgivings that anything he said sounded empty. He knew that his tiny block of matches would not last until they reached the post. What a fool he had been not to have filled his pockets before packing the supply on the sleigh. To sleep or stop for long in that terrific cold without a fire meant death; when the block was exhausted it would be a case of steady traveling without rest until shelter was reached. He doubted if they could make it.

The northern lights had overcast the sky when they reached the cabin and their greenish glow seemed a mockery of warmth and comfort. Shifting billows of emerald light rolled across the heavens and here and there from the glowing masses darted out fiery fingers. It was lonely up there in that desolate waste and as the men opened the door into the empty darkness of the cabin a bitter longing for human companionship welled up in their hungry hearts.

Jim started a fire in the small stove and went out to gather enough wood to last through the night. It would not do to let the fire die down because they had no blankets or robes. When he re-entered the cabin old Bill who was completely exhausted by the day's experiences had crawled into one of the empty bunks.

"My lungs hurts, Jim," he complained, "I'm afraid I'm gonna ketch a bad cold."

"Yes, thet were a bad duckin' ye got," replied Jim, "but we'll take her easy the first day or two till ye git straightened out. I'll keep the fire goin' tonight so ye kin git a good night's sleep."

"Tain't fair to let you tend her all night, but I'll keep her goin' tomorrer night when I feel better."

THE night passed slowly. Jim was obliged to replenish the fire several times because the tiny stove could hold only a few sticks.

Bill was troubled in his sleep. In the dark Jim could not see him, but he noticed that his breathing was interrupted and irregular. Often he tossed and groaned. Near morning he called to Jim in an irritable voice, strange to his usual uncomplaining disposition.

"Don't—don't put any more wood on thet —— fire. I'm burnin' up."

"All right Bill. How're ye feelin'?"

"My lungs is full o' needles," he groaned. "I got to git some fresh air."

He started to rise but sank back moaning.

"—— my head—it's afire."

Jim hastened to Bill's bunk and placed his hand upon his forehead. Under his palm he felt the hot parching heat of high fever. Bill was seriously ill. He stifled an exclamation of apprehension and hurried for water. What if Bill couldn't hit the trail in the morning?

His old hand trembled while he held the can to the sick man's lips.

"You'll be feelin' better in the morning Bill. It's pretty hot in here."

Bill did not answer but sank back panting.

Morning brought the gray, purple dawn of the far north. The soft velvety tints belied the dangerous temperature of the atmosphere. To the south could be seen the reflection of a sun that remained hidden as if it feared the bitter cold that infested the land.

Among the ghostly spruce-boughs crept a tiny pine squirrel silently searching for meager, little cones.

But now from the distance came bustling the little jay. He was hungry this morning and in a bad temper. Yesterday he had missed his usual flapjack. He espied Jim looking out of the cabin door. Had these abominable men returned? With a harsh screech he flew to a snow-covered mound of empty cans before the cabin and hopped about chattering and scolding.

Jim surveyed him sadly.

"She's pretty slim pickin's, isn't she, Jack? They won't be any more flapjacks around these diggin's for quite a spell. You'd better look up a new boardin'-place."

The great restlessness of Bill drew him inside.

The sick man was tossing and muttering.

"Anything I can do, Bill?" he inquired anxiously.

There was no reply, but presently the

mutterings became more and more distinct, until Jim realized he was delirious.

"You know it was your fault, Mae, you know it was. I couldn't furnish enough money for silks and hats—and you fooled me, you fooled me. You kept my nose to the grindstone."

He moaned and turned from side to side.

"But I'll strike her rich yet. I'll strike her rich yet, and then they can all go to ——."

His mutterings ended in a quavering sob of pain.

The helplessness of their situation shook Jim. He now knew Bill was dangerously sick. A bitterness against fate overwhelmed him.

The fighting chance of getting back to Fort Yukon had vanished. What remained? He would not and could not give up. In desperation he paced the floor of the hut racking his brain for a possible solution of their predicament. He took out the little block of matches and counted them over and over. There were nine. Perhaps it would be weeks before Bill could regain his feet. By keeping a continual fire he could save the matches, but the meager supply of flour would last only a few days. He could not be absent from the cabin long enough to hunt caribou which this time of year fed high up in the wind-swept hills. Moose were always scarce in this country.

Then with an exclamation of joy he remembered that there was lying behind the cabin a large pile of discarded moose bones. The shreds of meat which remained upon these had been preserved by the ice and snow. If he boiled them into soup he would have food enough to sustain them until Bill had recovered sufficiently to tend the fire.

He carefully laid the small block of matches on the table and hastened out to examine the pile, leaving the door slightly ajar to freshen the air in the cabin.

The jay eyed him speculatively as he disappeared around the corner. Many times when the men went out chopping wood and feeding the dogs he had snatched dainty morsels from the table in the cabin, and this morning he was very hungry indeed. He hopped silently in through the door and flew on to the table. It was disgustingly barren. Then his glittering little eyes saw the matches. He skipped over and pecked carefully at the red tips. They were very tough and did not taste good, but how beautiful they were. He would take them to his nest and add them to his already large stock of gewgaws. With a dexterous nip he picked up the block and flew out through the door and into the forest.

When Jim reentered the cabin he carried a huge armful of bones. He was elated over the great number which his search in the snow had revealed. The future seemed suddenly to have grown brighter.

"I'll bile these up," he said aloud to himself in the manner of sourdoughs who have spent a great deal of time in solitude, "and I'll freeze the soup in cans and use her as we need her. We'll play a few games of solo with the boys yet," he exclaimed as he went out to gather some cans.

It was not until he started to put the snowy tins on the table that he looked for the matches and saw that they were gone.

He paused for an instant, a little uncertain.

"Thought I put 'em on the table," he said softly. "Must not have though—must not have."

He dreaded to feel in his pockets because he felt vaguely that they were not there.

A careful search of his clothing did not reveal them. A painstaking examination of the floor yielded nothing but a few burnt stubs. He looked breathlessly at Bill to see whether or not he might have been out of his bunk while in delirium. Bill lay as before, sleeping uneasily.

"——," he murmured huskily, "it must a bin the bird."

He staggered out through the door as though dizzy and peered about for the jay; but the bird had disappeared.

In the forest a whistling through the spruce needles heralded the coming of an arctic blizzard. From the low eaves above a fitful gust whirled down a powdery cloud of snow. It was useless to look for the bird's nest. It might be miles away.

He closed the door to a world turned white with driving crystals, and sought the side of Bill's bunk. As he looked down upon the unconscious form of his old partner his blue eyes filled with tears and the gnarled hand that groped for that of the sick man's trembled.

"I'm afraid we've sunk our last hole, Bill," he whispered gently, "I'm afraid we've sunk our last hole."

Grim days followed in the little cabin.

For Jim they were days of burrowing

under the deep snow for broken branches, of hunger and lack of sleep, of listening helplessly to Bill's tortured ravings, of the hopeless fight of the human who feels the end is approaching yet strives to put off the inevitable.

Bill seemed to grow steadily worse. There were times when Jim fought like mad to keep him in the bunk. Long sleepless nights of tending the sick prospector and keeping the fire had broken down his strength. Often he fell across Bill's bunk unconscious from the loss of rest and awoke to find the fire almost burned out.

At these times he felt like giving up, like crawling to his bunk and there while under the anesthesia of deep slumber let the insidious cold creep in and painlessly congeal their blood. But, no, that would be murder. While Bill lived he must fight, fight. He dreaded to think of his partner passing away. In the faint spark of life that burned yet within Bill's form there was companionship. He did not want to be left alone.

But he knew the end would come some day. On the last tiny slip of dates, torn from a calender down in Fort Yukon, he had made a brief record of their misfortunes. December ninth had been the day that Bill went through the ice. This he had noted on the date square. On the back he had painfully written with his stub of pencil an account of Bill's sickness and the loss of the matches. Often as he fumbled with the little red ribbon that still was attached to the slip he wondered what the old-timers would say when the news went down the river that Hard-Luck Bill and Skagway Jim had cashed in up on the Porcupine.

Years might pass before some wandering trapper or Indian would stop in at the cabin and find human bones mouldering in the bunks. Several times he had been sitting with a group around a trading-post stove when such reports had come in, and like the rest of the men of the north, he had tossed reflection away with a glass of whisky. It was part of the game.

Each day it became more difficult for him to rustle firewood. He tired so easily and the snow was ever increasing in depth. Also he was getting forgetful. Twice he had gone out and left the cabin door open and returned to find the cabin bitter cold.

For some days Bill had not muttered or tossed. He lay in a coma with glazed eyes. Jim could not get him to speak, though he sometimes sipped listlessly of the soup.

Jim had stopped thinking of death. The last time he had looked for the little slip of paper with the ribbon he could not find it. It did not matter. If only the wood wasn't so hard to get and if only he could sleep—sleep—sleep forever.

"Jim—Jim." Gaunt fingers were plucking feebly at the old gray head pressed upon the sharp edge of the bunk.

"What—time—is—it—Jim? Jim—I'm—askin'—you—what—time—is—it?"

Jim was fast asleep.

In the stove a tiny stick snapped and fell apart. An ember glowed faintly for an instant and then grew cold and lifeless. The fire had died.

"Jim—she's—cold."

Gradually the frigid air pressed through the minute openings between the moss-chinked logs. The few nails in the cabin gathered a whitish coating. From the men's nostrils came little puffs of white. The frost fiends were at work silently and grimly.

Forging up the steep slope from the river came a dancing host of wolfish ears and bushy tails. From the sleigh behind a long whip lashed out and snapped viciously at a furry flank.

"Moosh—you crab-hounds, moosh!"

A team of malemiuts floundered through the deep snow to the cabin.

"How you vas in der? How you vas?"

A monstrous hide-covered apparition was beating on the door with a whip butt. Heavy shoulders crashed aside the wooden bolt.

"Hey! You fellers tink dis Summer? Vy don't you got fire?"

The man peered about and took in the situation.

"Ye willikers, de boys bane all in."

The big, red Swedish face puckered with concern. From the depths of his parka flashed forth a grimy flask.

"Har, Yim, took a shot."

Powerful paws jerked back Jim's head and thrust the bottle between his lips. The concoction would have revived an Egyptain mummy.

Jim began to choke and shudder.

The bottle was applied to Bill.

"He bane fine stuff. Aye make him myself, from prunes," exclaimed the Swede with satisfaction as he noted the effects of the liquor.

"Now you yents vait. Aye build fire and taw dis place out."

"Big Ole" was a dynamic personality. Under his management the stove became a glowing little volcano. From his magic bottle he poured into Jim and Bill new life.

"Boys, she bane a close vun," he chuckled as he picked Jim up and thrust him into a bunk.

He tossed a handful of tea into a pot and went out to his sleigh for robes.

The old prospectors were soon warm and as they lay a feeling of vast comfort crept over them.

"Ole, how come you to be up in this part o' the country?" inquired Jim sleepily.

"Same t'ing you," laughed Ole, "ve come up little vile ago. But ve tink you fellers go all de vay up to Caribou Creek. Aye and Mike Murphy, ve bane a little vays down-river on Bear Creek."

"How'd you find out we was here?" quavered Bill weakly.

"Ha, dat bane a funny vun. Dis morning Aye goes out to cut timber for cribbing and Aye shops down tree vid a —— camp robber's nest in him. Var der vasn't in dat nest! Vile Aye was looking at all dis stuff Aye finds dis paper."

He produced the little date slip upon which Jim had written the account of his and his partner's misfortunes.

"Yimminy crickets, tinks Aye, ver can dose fellers be. Den Aye tols Mike, Aye tink Aye took a run up-river and look round. Preety lucky dat bird roost near my cabin—huh?"

Ole laughed as he concluded and then suddenly paused and began searching in his pocket.

"Aye'll show you fellers someting. Mike and Aye have struck her rich. She vill go four dollars to de foot and de pay-streak bane a hundred foot vide. Aye don't forget de gude turn you yents did me in Fairbanks. Dat's vy you is getting a chance to stake next to Mike and me. Der is enough to make us all rich. Ve'll name de new diggings 'Camp Robber'—eh? She gonna be beeg camp some day."

He laughed again, still hunting through his pockets.

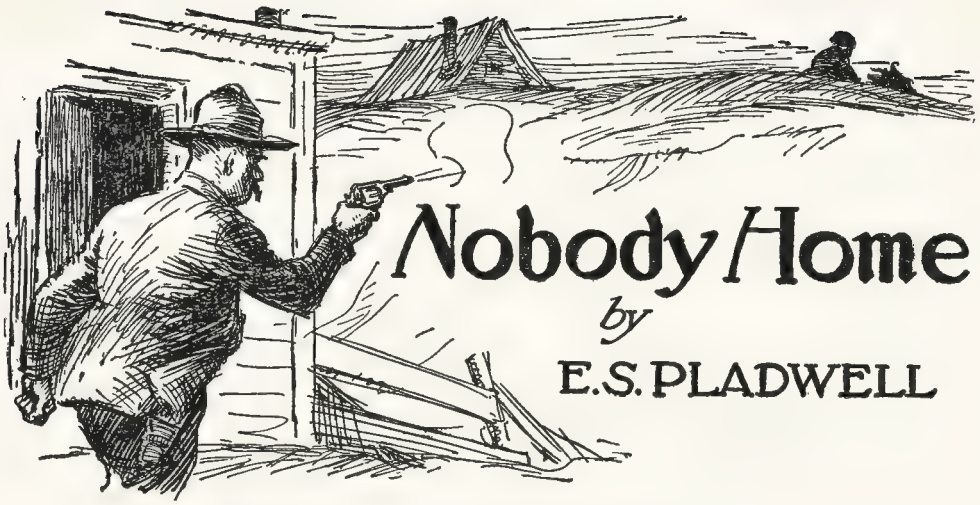
"Ah har she bane. Look at dis."

He stepped over to Jim's bunk and extended an irregular chunk of dull, yellow metal.

"Coarse stuff ain't it, Yim?"

He peered at Jim and then at Bill.

"Ye—wis," he whispered, "de boys is snoosin'."



Nobody Home

by

E. S. PLADWELL

Author of "A Pot of Gold," "The Silent Captain," etc.

OLD Chief Juliano was saturated with sin and depravity. He swore, gambled, smoked, drank, chewed, lied and stole. He was getting mild at that. In bygone days he had burned ranches, shot settlers, crucified soldiers, tortured sheepmen and murdered innocent teamsters in their beds. Now he had settled down to a ripe and hearty old age in a shanty just outside Empire City, where he resided among his rougher relatives.

He had lived like a savage and looked the part. A massive copper-mahogany face glared at folks from beneath a thatch of greasy black hair. His eyes and mouth were cruel. His hooked nose was predatory. He gave one the impression of an old eagle, battered but unrepentant.

He was sixty years old. His tribe was once rated high in war but now they all went to Harvard or jail. Among its members were two college professors, six murderers, a National League catcher, an orator, some wife-beaters, five attorneys, two doctors, a forger, thirty respectable ranchers and a score of bootleggers.

Old Juliano didn't approve of the milder members of his tribe. Those wishy-washy persons, tainted with the effete civilization of the white man, received his blasphemous scorn whenever he met them. He preferred the wilder set, the uncouth gang of tattered, battered bucks and half-breeds who, with their quarreling squaws, shared his town residence in Winter and loped off to the distant hills in Spring.

In Winter the sheriff of Empire County was always nervous.

But one Springtime a famed evangelist arrived in the city. The Reverend Gipsy Jones pitched his tabernacle-tent in a vacant lot, organized the ministers, staged a mammoth Bible parade, and preached salvation to mighty congregations.

A wave of emotional fervor swept the district. The great revival meetings brought folks from hundreds of miles into town. The railroads ran excursions. The city teemed with visitors. At night dozens of gasoline torches illuminated the sea of faces in the great fervid perspiring mass of humanity that jammed the enormous tent to overflowing.

Old Chief Juliano noted the movements of the crowds and at length curiosity overcame him, so that on the last night of the meetings he allowed himself to be swept into the great tent, walking like a stately tree carried along by a gurgling current.

An hour later, wrapped in a gray blanket, he was thinking it over. He sat almost under the pulpit, a silent, wrinkled, inscrutable, unapproachable figure taking in the eloquent and persuasive words of the preacher and gradually warming to their truths. Later music, prayers and exhortations rolled over the tabernacle; and finally he succumbed and was bathed in a new but delightful emotional wave which thrilled the embers of his dead old soul.

He realized his wanton wickedness. The sinful old Apache lost his stoicism and wept.

Suddenly to him the world changed. It looked different and felt differently. His heart was uplifted. He felt that he would like to tell the news. Folks ought to sit up and take notice. He knew he was an important personage—a chieftain—and his conversion was no paltry affair. He caught the evangelist right after the meeting.

"I got converted," he announced, with great pride.

The preacher wanted to catch a train for his next field of endeavor. He was tired; he had given his best and felt like a wilted rag; but he took time to be polite.

"I am very glad. Very glad. Very glad indeed."

The old chief felt there was something missing. His somber brown eyes looked baffled. His soul had undergone the most momentous change in all its turbulent career. It had been lifted to a new plane. He felt there ought to be a little more ceremony about it, a little more joy and hurrah.

"What do I do now?" he inquired, dully.

"Do?" The preacher blinked. "Why, keep cleansed of sin. My blessings go with you. Good-by. Let me catch my train."

The tough old chief clamped his iron jaw and refused to budge. He wasn't satisfied. Salvation was too vague for his elemental mind. There didn't seem to be any instructions or rules to it. The trail ahead wasn't blazed properly. It was foreign territory where the old villain's footsteps had never trodden before.

"What do I do?" he insisted, glaring with belligerent eyes and blocking the exit.

The preacher edged out, somewhat nervously. He was reasonably brave but he didn't like the aspect of that murderous old face.

"Do good, that's all," he replied, over his shoulder. "Just do good. Do good to your fellow man—white or dark!"

"All right," grunted the chief, sulkily. "I do good. All right, I don't care."

BILL FRASER, Sheriff of Empire County and a native son thereof, was a little bit dubious about the chief's attack of religion.

Bill Fraser was now fifty years of age, with the leathery face and longhorn mustache of the typical old-time frontiersman. He was born in the tumultuous days of Arizona. In early manhood he remembered a fight in a stockade where Juliano and a horde of yelling, shouting, shooting savages had hurled themselves upon the palings and almost taken the little colony by surprize.

Since then the sheriff had heard much of Juliano. Very much. The old reptile's goings-on never seemed to end. When a grinning deputy brought the news of Juliano's conversion into the sheriff's office, Bill Fraser snorted.

"That old thunderbolt? What are you handing me?"

"It's the truth. He's tellin' everybody all about it. Say's he's got a new feeling here."

And the deputy put a hand over his heart.

"He'd better have! If he doesn't tone down the racket in his drunken shanty outside of town, he'll get a new feelin' here!"

The sheriff patted the seat of his trousers.

"Maybe it's true," conceded the deputy. "About his conversion, I mean. They say the preacher could have wrung the heart of a wooden Indian!"

"We'll see," decided Sheriff Bill. "Let's wait a while."

But the orgies in the shanty didn't seem to diminish. Old Chief Juliano's turbulent crowd danced, yelled, drank, gambled and stole with all their usual vigor.

Beyond a high wall at the rear of the shanty there was a constant moving of ponies, flivvers, harness, musical instruments, clocks, spare tires, tools, tinware, old junk and any other loot which grasping brown hands could lift. The officers suspected it but seldom got the evidence, for the tribe's members were always coming and going. Nobody could keep track of them. The only fixture was old Juliano. He was hardly sober enough to steal anything.

"Converted!" sneered the sheriff, in his office two weeks after the evangelist had left. "Converted! Yah! Purified! He's as pure as a garbage-can! Gimme the details of what happened in the shanty last night!"

This to a deputy who was just making a report.

"It was an awful row!" said the deputy. "Johnny Snow started fightin' with his wife. Eddie Cloud hit him with a bottle. Then everybody horned in. Old Juliano was startin' after the whole crowd with a crowbar when we stopped it. Two arrested. One in hospital. Juliano didn't start it so we let him go."

"Converted!" snorted Sheriff Bill. "Oh, well. Let that matter go for the time. I've got something else on my mind. Send McAndrews in."

Within a minute a tall, broad shouldered man stood before the sheriff, erect and with heels together. He was a giant. His face was broad and mustached, with a do-or-die expression in his eyes and not the slightest touch of humor to his rigid mouth. He looked heavy and slow-witted but a dangerous man to trifle with. He was all of that. The somber McAndrews, big of foot and utterly fearless, had only been a deputy half a year; but in that time his solemn, impersonal, steady, unruffled method of arresting—and even killing—made people fear him. The sheriff looked at him with admiration.

"McAndrews," said Sheriff Bill, "do you know the town of Dry Lake? It's about thirty-forty mile north of here. Not much of a town. Five or six shanties, a store, two dance-halls and a haystack. There's trouble up there. Its people put in their time fighting. Sort of a general community pastime. You'd better go over there and straighten 'em up."

"Yes, sir," responded the solemn McAndrews.

"Mind, it's goin' to take work and tact. Those people are pretty lawless. Been that way since Arizona was a pup. We've sorter let 'em alone, knowin' their ways; but when they bust loose with a gang fight or a shootin' every week, it's time I took a hand. I've been too easy-going. 'Lection time's comin' along and I can't afford to let folks criticize me for layin' down on the job. Get me?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Now you go make that community behave. Treat 'em gentle till they start something. Then land on 'em with both feet. Get me! Try and jolly 'em into peace; but if you can't do that, go after 'em with a gun. What I want is peace. Get me? I'm relyin' on you to hold 'em down. You've got the Law behind you. All of it. Make 'em obey the Law!"

"Yes, sir," said McAndrews.

Old Sheriff Bill looked irritated for a second and he pulled his gray mustache. This McAndrews was too much like a machine. No emotion, no humor, no play to his big and bony face. And yet the man always delivered the goods. The sheriff remembered that. He nodded.

"All right. Beat it."

"Yes, sir," said McAndrews.

STOUT Paul Bozeman, bartender, bookkeeper and bouncer of the Ideal saloon and dance hall at Dry Lake, turned his head when an unfamiliar figure clumped through the doorway, shouldered past the small mid-afternoon crowd, and glowered at Paul from across the counter. There was something commanding and official and forbidding about the stranger that made Paul vaguely nervous.

"Vell?" asked Paul. "Vot you want?"

"I'm McAndrews," growled the newcomer with his thick burred voice. "I'm from the sheriff's office."

"Oh. How's Bill!"

"Verra good."

"Dot's fine. Have a drink?" And Paul's hospitable hand dived toward a large, fat demijohn, one of many lying beneath his counter.

The stranger's steel-gray eyes looked into Paul's.

"A drink of what?" he demanded.

Paul's hands went back to the counter swiftly.

"Soda," he hastened to answer. "Pop. Slop. Hog-wash. Slush!"

There was scorn in his voice that he couldn't conceal. Paul had heard of prohibition but the idea never sank in. He ignored it, scorned it, snubbed it. Dry Lake was as wet as the Atlantic outside the three-mile limit!

"The law will be obeyed!" announced McAndrews, staring with those cold, inexorable eyes.

"For why?" exploded Paul. "You ain'd a Fetteral officer. You ain'd a probishun enforcer. You belong to der coundy sheriff, ain'd it? Bill, he's a goot scoud. He ain'd after me. He and me iss frients. He minds his pizness and I mind mine. For why you talk that way?"

"The law will be obeyed!"

A startled crowd had gathered around the big deputy. Others arrived from the outside; and all of them gave him a strange, bewildered stare. They felt that a new era had dawned somehow. It made them uncomfortable and angry and resentful, even though they were cowed by the power of McAndrews's mighty name.

The big deputy caught their attitude. He felt that here was the time to drive his lesson home. He had a mission. He might as well get it off his chest now, while the crowd was subdued. He intended to keep them subdued.

He mounted an empty box lying beside the bar and stared down upon the assemblage, with his heels together and his right hand close to the big forty-five which swung in a holster just under the edge of his coat.

"You people!" he commanded.

There was silence fraught with alarm. Citizens looked at each other nervously. The inexorable Scotchman loomed up like a tower of wrath, a living incarnation of the terror that lies in the law. He had them hypnotized, terrorized, buffaloed; and he knew it.

"I'm here to see that there'll be no more fightin'! D'ye hear me? We'll be havin' peace in the place or I'll be knowin' why! The fir-rst man that draws a gun in the town from now on, I'll shoot like a dog! D'ye hear me now? There'll be no more fights! The law will be obeyed! The fir-rst man that draws a gun, I'll shoot like a dog!"

It was a thundering declaration. There was an awed silence. McAndrews stepped down from the box while citizens gave way for him hastily. They knew he meant business. His words were plain.

Then, as if to mock him, a shotgun roared outside. *Bang!*

Then came a muffled yell.

To McAndrews it was a direct affront. It mocked his words. He stiffened. He drew his six-shooter and made for the door. The crowd, with bated breath, huddled together and looked on. All but one man, a dark-skinned little fellow who slipped out of a side door and streaked toward a little house down the main street, the fifth from the saloon. There he found what he expected.

A husky half-breed lay on the ground, writhing and grunting, while over him bent a young Indian with a shotgun in his hands.

"Run!" gasped the newcomer, to the young Indian. "Run for your life! There's a deputy sheriff here! He'll shoot you like a dog! He's coming down the street! Hurry up! Get out of here!"

The young Indian, an intelligent-looking fellow with a high forehead, straightened and handed over the shotgun.

"That's all right," he answered. "I'll surrender. I'm willing to face any jury in Arizona. You know why I shot him. Everybody does!"

"Run!" shrieked the wild-eyed informant. "You don't understand! This deputy's different! He's crazy! He's promised to shoot any one! Get away and argue it later! Jump on that pony! Get into the hills! Then go down to the sheriff! I tell you, your life's in danger!"

The young Indian, with the instinct of his race, sensed that this man was telling the truth. Down the street footsteps were pattering fast. Some one was coming and the crowd was following him.

Without a glance at the man he had shot, the young fellow leaped on a black pony, lashed it up the slope of a little hill behind the shanty, and disappeared over its brow just as the deputy turned a corner. The deputy didn't know the town very well. Otherwise he would have found his way to the house sooner.

McAndrews arrived around the corner of the house just as the top of the Indian's head disappeared over the hilltop. In an instant the deputy's six-shooter leaped out and pumped four shots toward the head. But it was too late.

The outraged deputy stood and glared. Townspeople drew up behind him. Some of them bent over the wounded man, who was shot through both legs; but McAndrews gave them no attention. Swiftly he reloaded his gun. Then he turned to the crowd.

"Get me a horse!"

"B-b-but you don't want to chase that poor devil!" pleaded the dark-faced man who had warned the fugitive. "That's Johnny Miles. Named after General Miles. If there was ever a man had reason to shoot that other fellow it was Johnny Mi——"

"The law must be obeyed! I want a horse!"

The tall, gnarled giant with the inexorable eyes and the burred voice wasn't subject to arguments. The dark-faced man turned a little whiter. He said nothing. The crowd was also silent. The deputy looked around impatiently, saw no horse available, and turned his footsteps quickly toward the saloon, ignoring everybody. He rushed into Paul Bozeman's place and confronted the alarmed owner.

"You! I want a horse. Quick!"

"Horse!" quavered Bozeman. "Ain'd you got your own!"

"He's tired. I want that buckskin in your corral, back here."

"Him? Not him, Mister! Dot hoss iss a pet! He ain'd used to chasin' peoples all over the country! I keep him for when I want to ride to der town!"

McAndrews' fist crashed on the counter.

"You'll be tryin' to block the law?" he challenged, thrusting his ominous face forward. "You'll be interferin' with an officer?"

"No!" demurred Bozeman, hastily. "No! Not me! You can take der —— —— pony und bring your law as far away from here as you want!"

McAndrews caught a veiled insult in the words but he didn't have time to resent it properly. He rushed out of the back door, cornered the sleek little buckskin, saddled it, let down the corral gates, and breezed out of town on the trail of the slim young Indian on the black horse.

Then began a stern, relentless chase which covered endless miles of valleys, hills and sand-wastes. The trail of the fugitive was easy to pick. He had left in a hurry and had no time to choose his route. The footprints of his horse pointed northward around the edge of the great flat basin which gave Dry Lake its name and then kept heading northward through sandhills and yellow valleys which led toward wild mountain-ranges in the dim distance.

The deputy saw the fugitive far ahead on the flat lands near the lake. So clear was the air that every line of the young Indian's slim body was discernible though by now he was between four and six miles away. The distance narrowed somewhat. The Indian's horse was tiring from its fast spurt and the deputy's animal was just starting to run; but after an hour or so McAndrews' animal settled down to a steadier jog and the relative distance between the two horses remained unchanged.

They drew away from the lake at last and went over a ridge, where the Indian dared not lose time by trying to conceal his tracks in rocky canoñs. They passed the ridge and entered a narrow valley. They went up another small ridge and dodged among hills, emerging upon a great plain studded with sage, yucca-palms and cactus. The sun set. Dusk descended. But the Indian kept going. So did the deputy.

McAndrews stared straight ahead, with determined eyes and tightened jaw. He, McAndrews, had been called upon to vindicate the law. He intended to do it. The town must be subdued. This Indian must become an example. To the deputy, the Indian stood as a living symbol of the lawlessness that must cease. Must cease. Must!

Darkness came. The trail dimmed. The deputy halted, alighted, and groped ahead by means of an electric flashlight. He knew the Indian might see the light, but he knew, too, that the Indian would be impressed by the ceaseless, sleepless, unrelenting power of the law which was reaching for him and would keep reaching though the heavens fell. McAndrews felt that the object-lesson was worth while.

Later, the somber deputy hobbled his horse, spread blankets near the edge of a tiny gulch, and set himself to sleep for a few hours. That might give the Indian time to sleep also. And perhaps, in the dim hours of the morning, the deputy would be able to make cautious progress with the help of the flashlight and gain on the fugitive. McAndrews was a little vague about his procedure, but that was for the future.

The deputy slept the sleep of the just though his subconscious mind was set like an alarm clock. Once he thought he heard a faraway call, indistinct as a whisper. He awoke instantly. After fifteen minutes he went back to sleep. Later, he thought he heard a footfall. Again he awoke. This time it took twenty minutes of absolute silence to convince him. Still later he sensed the presence of bodies. He awoke with a jump. His right hand went to his gun. But too late.

Two pairs of arms had pinioned his hands and two other persons were sitting on his head.

"I'M A peaceful man and mebbe I'm a mite too easy-goin'," remarked Sheriff Bill, as he lolled back in his swivel-chair and laid his booted feet on the window-sill of his office at the county jail, "but when old Chief Juliano and all his rapscallions fades out of town all of a sudden this-a-way, I'd better get ready for trouble. I wonder which way they went!"

"I dunno," admitted his pet deputy. "The whole gang just lit out. Breezed. Blew. Vamosed. Last night."

"Did they take their furniture and household goods?"

"Nope. Not all of it. They took their stolen truck somewhere, but the legitimate stuff's still in the house."

The sheriff's brow knitted.

"Now I know it's trouble! This ain't the regular Spring house-movin'. It's devilment of some kind.

He straightened up.

"Tip off the city police. Keep our hosses ready. See that the auto-mobeels have got plenty of gas and water. Notify our special deputies to stand ready at a minute's notice Get me?"

"Yep. It's all done. By the way, chief, here's a letter just brought by special delivery." And the deputy handed over a missive bearing a blue stamp.

The sheriff took the envelope, ripped it open, and perused the letter while his eyes seemed to pop. Then he tossed the missive to the deputy.

"Read it!" he snorted. "If that doesn't curl your hair, you've got no hair to curl!"

The deputy read:

William Fraser, Esq.,
Sheriff of Empire County.

DEAR SIR:

Because of a rather unusual emergency which now confronts the better element of the community of Dry Lake, I take the liberty of bringing the present deplorable situation to your attention so that you may take the proper steps to rectify it.

It appears that one of your deputies, a person of undoubted integrity but perhaps questionable discretion, arrived here some days ago and announced with, I hear, rather undue emphasis that he would inflict death upon any citizen of Dry Lake who essayed to display a firearm or use the same. Your deputy, though doubtless actuated by laudable intentions, succeeded only in bringing about a regrettable condition in our community.

I fear that your deputy's remarks were made in such vigorous, not to say brusk, manner that our citizens were startled and frightened, if not affronted.

At the moment, by an unfortunate coincidence, Mr. John Nelson Miles, one of our most esteemed young citizens and a graduate of the State Agricultural College—where he won honors for his treatise on Soil Transfusion, by the way—discharged a shotgun into the person of one Felix Bull, a rather notorious ruffian. Your deputy, I hear, gave the impression that he was going to shoot Mr. Miles forthwith, though the latter had expressed himself as ready and willing to surrender to the officers of the law. Your deputy, I understand, gave time for no explanations, and Mr. Miles naturally made his escape as quickly as possible.

Though Mr. Miles did not end the life of Bull, I believe that Mr. Miles would have been amply justified had he done so.

For several years Mr. Miles has borne persecution from Bull to an extent which must have been quite humiliating. I am in a position to know that Bull has robbed him, beaten him, bullied him, and, for extreme insult, persuaded Mr. Miles' pretty but rather thoughtless young wife to become estranged. Mr. Miles has borne all these things with a most exemplary—I might say marvelous—fortitude, but when Bull stood in Mr. Miles' front yard and directed coarse and unseemly remarks at Mr. Miles' person as well as his ancestors and even his wife, Mr. Miles felt a regrettable but most natural anger, and, deplorable though it may be, discharged a load of Number 1 shot into the lower portions of Bull's anatomy.

I may state in passing that Mr. Miles is a serious and studious person who is devoted to his books much more than the average young man, and his action probably surprized no one more than himself. I might also state that our community of Dry Lake, even to the rowdy element, is unanimous in the belief that Mr. Miles' action was most natural.

Your deputy, however, insisted on pursuing Mr. Miles far into the rougher country north of here. I regret to state that at this juncture a coterie of our younger and more irresponsible citizens, some white but mainly of the aboriginal race, decided to follow your deputy and did so without his knowledge, so that they came upon him while he was sleeping and captured him by force of numbers.

To the infinite regret of our better element, we are told that the captors, actuated no doubt by a feeling of irritation and a misguided sense of humor, tied your deputy to a large palm, where they have from time to time fed him raw meat in large quantities, despite his vigorous protests. I am told that our ringleaders, with rather questionable levity, say to each other: "He's a tough guy; he eats raw meat; give him some more," after which your deputy is asked to make a speech.

It is not necessary to add that your deputy has viewed these exercises with much repugnance.

I have ventured to remonstrate with the ringleaders, but though my remarks have been received courteously enough, they make such remarks as: "He says he's tough. Let's see how tough he is."

I have advised Mr. Miles to go directly to your office without tarrying. He should arrive at the same time, or before, this missive arrives. Your deputy is still held captive in a small clearing about five miles north of here and I trust that you will take the proper steps to remedy the present lamentable situation. As for Mr. Miles, I commend him to your mercy, knowing that he has acted only under the most extreme provocation.

Respectfully yours,
Ephraim L. Pillsbury.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the pet deputy, as he read the letter. "Hadn't we better beat it to Dry Lake?"

"No!" snarled sheriff Bill. "That letter was written two days ago. Pillsbury lives twenty mile north of there. The letter came by stage. If they haven't killed McAndrews by now he's probably hittin' for home. Serves him right! Dog-gone him, they ought to have killed him. Mebbe now I'll have to do it!"

"Who's Pillsbury?"

"Bug-hunter. Professor. Got a big Summer home out there. One house, one

cook, one haystack, one flivver and ten million bugs stuck on pins. Otherwise he's all right."

"What are you goin' to do now?"

"Wait. Wait for Miles and wait for McAndrews. I'll let Miles out on bonds; but when I ketch hold of McAndrews—" and the sheriff clenched his fist.

But the wait was over-long. Hours passed. The day passed and a new one dawned, with Sheriff Bill growing more nervous and irritable with every hour.

"I WONDER what happened to old Juliano and his gang?" pondered the deputy idly, late in the afternoon, as the sheriff kept pacing up and down the room.

"Him? I dunno. I'm more worried about that fool business at Dry Lake. And the newspapers. The reporters have smelt that there's something goin' on. They're campin' on my trail. If this keeps up much longer, I'm a-goin to go plum crazy!"

"I wonder if Juliano's mixed in that Dry Lake business?"

"Him? No! He didn't leave here till night before last. Takes a day to get to the professor's house. He's up to some other devilment."

"What devilment?"

Sheriff Bill snorted and his eyes showed a lambent flare of anger.

"You git to thinkin' up new troubles and I'll be stompin' my boots on your dog-gone carcass!"

The deputy shut up.

The hours ticked by. Late afternoon came. At last the sheriff could stand it no longer. He should have been at Dry Lake and he knew it; his duty demanded that he investigate this matter; but each minute he had expected one of the victims to arrive. Now he realized that the total loss of time was enormous.

"Come on!" he decided, at last. "Get the big car. We've waited long enough. Now we'll burn up the road. We'll reach Dry Lake by mornin'. Then we'll make some people sizzle!"

BECAUSE of a couple of punctures, Sheriff Bill's high-powered car rolled over the desert flat and into Dry Lake at nine in the morning, with the sheriff in a snappy and belligerent mood. He had bounced and banged around in the rear seat of the auto all night as it hurtled over the bumpy road; and when he stormed into Paul Bozeman's sin palace with two deputies he was like a volcano, half-slumbering but ready to erupt.

" 'Lo, Bill," greeted Paul.

" 'Lo."

"Have a drink."

"Drink?"

Sheriff Bill banged a fist on the counter.

"There'll be no more drinks! Get me? You people don't deserve good treatment! I've been too easy-goin'! Enough's enough! Just because I've treated you decent, you people think you can carry on out here any way you —— please! There'll be no more of it! Get me? This place is goin' to be law-abidin' from now on if I have to call out the troops!"

"But I ain'd done nudding!" protested the injured Paul.

"Then everybody else in town has, and you might as well be in with the rest! Now tell me. What's happened here?"

"Nudding much. Pizness iss quiet."

Paul waved a fat arm to take in the room.

"You see? Only two peoples."

The sheriff noted a cot in a corner, half-concealed by a makeshift drapery. There was apparently some one on the cot. Sheriff Bill felt curious.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

"Him? Chimmy Razor. Half-breed."

"What's the matter with him?"

"His ankle. It iss broke."

"How'd he break it!"

"He fell off a roof."

"Where?"

"Oh, up by der old abandoned mine house up past der Pillsbury place."

"Um. How did he happen to fall?"

"His uncle pushed him off."

"What for?"

"Because Chimmy Razor took a shot at another uncle."

"What did he do that for?"

"Because Juliano and some more relatives was shooting at him."

"What?" shouted Sheriff Bill.

"Sure. Der battle was pretty nearly over——"

"What battle?"

"Why, der battle between der Indians."

Sheriff Bill reached a muscular arm over the counter and dug his fingers into the fat German's shoulders.

"Say it and say it quick!" demanded the

sheriff. "Where was this battle? What was it all about?"

"Why, aboud your deputy!"

"Talk fast or I'll mash you into a pulp!"

"I don'd know," pleaded the perspiring bartender, "I only know what I hear. Peoples don'd talk much. Der deputy came here und speak big mit his mout'. He chase Miles out in der country. Peoples—Injuns—chase der deputy und catch him, und giff him —— for two-t'ree days. Bimeby new Injuns come from der city und fight mit our Injuns. Our Injuns run away und leave der deputy to der city Injuns."

The fat bartender shrugged.

"Now you know everydink."

"Yes." Sarcastically. "It's a fine, large story. Just complete enough to get everybody into jail but not complete enough to get anybody out. Where's my deputy?"

The sweating bartender shrugged.

"Der city Injuns. Juliano, I dunno."

"Well, which direction did Juliano take?"

"I dunno. He got der deputy und faded away."

"Where's Bull, the man shot by Miles?"

"In a shanty. Two houses over dere."

The bartender pointed eastward.

"He ain'd feelin' goot."

"Phooie!"

The sheriff turned an exasperated face toward his two subordinates.

"This whole durned town ought to be in jail! I've been too easy-goin'! This is my reward! Can you see the headlines in the newspapers? Battle and bloodshed and anarchy? Fine thing for my administration! Yeh! The voters'll believe this Dry Lake district's been allowed to run hog-wild. All because of one —— fool deputy! Wait till I catch him! Wait! I'll make him eat raw meat! I'll eat some myself! I'll bite a chunk out of his hide!"

The sheriff started pacing up and down. Then he controlled himself and halted. He snapped more questions at the bartender.

"How many were hurt in this battle? How long did it last? Where's the men that was in it! Hey?"

"I don'd know nudding about nobody," pleaded the bartender. "Only, nobody was shot. Der shooting, it was rotten!"

"Mine won't be," promised the sheriff, grimly.

Then to his deputies:

"Come on. Let's look around town. This fat Dutchman's coverin' up. He knows more than he'll tell about. We'll see him when we come back. Then we'll look into his liquor supply and turn him over to the Government. That'll fix him plenty!"

The sheriff and the deputies stamped outside; but their footsteps had not died away before the stout bartender fairly leaped to the task of destroying his stock. Bottles, barrels and demijohns were rushed out of the back door. In an hour the place was innocent and sweet, as the sheriff intended it should be. The sheriff had cleaned that saloon by a few timely words; but the Dutchman's soul was in anguish. Whisky was expensive.

The sheriff's party went down the main alley of the town, with its corral, tin cans, wabbly fences, and row of houses, some of them good but most of them shanties. The newcomers paused in front of the second house and turned past the battered picket fence to begin an official investigation upon the victim of Miles' shotgun.

Suddenly the sound of a galloping horse clattered to their ears. Around the corner dashed a big bay animal with a tattered young Indian leaning forward and looking alarmed. Horse and rider rushed up to the three men standing by the gate.

"Hide me!" pleaded the rider. "They're right behind me! Less than a mile!"

The young man was disheveled and disorganized. His morale was gone. His eyes stared, his hair hung down in a tangled mop, and his cheek and chin were hollow from privation. Instantly he realized he was talking to strangers and started to draw away; but sheriff Bill forestalled it—

"Who's behind you?" he snapped.

"Juliano's crowd! They're humping across the sand-flat. If you let 'em come into town, I'm gone!"

"Well, what have you been doin'?" demanded the sheriff, eying the new arrival with much disfavor.

"Nothing."

"Yeh. Like the rest of this dog-goned town! Well, what are they chasin' you for?"

"I don't know."

Sheriff Bill's temper was beyond the boiling point. He had been balked and baffled and worried to the limit. A sleepless night made it worse. And now this young fellow furnished the spark which set him ablaze. He strode up to the horse's head and grabbed the bridle savagely.

"Come down, you —— ——! Git off that hoss! You —— —— lyin', double-tongued son of a polecat! Open your trap and talk sense or I'll bust you so wide apart that they'll never collect enough of you for a funeral! Now speak! Quick! I'm the sheriff of this county!"

The young Indian's eyes showed anger, then incredulity, then joy. He leaped from the horse.

"Just the man I've been trying to see for days!" he shouted, "I surrender. Take me to town. I'll explain everything."

"You'd better start explainin' right quick!"

"I'll be glad to. My name is Miles. John Nelson Miles. I happened to shoot a man. One of your deputies pursued me. I had intended to surrender but I didn't have a chance. Some of my friends caught your deputy. While they were holding him I determined to go into the city and see you in person. I borrowed the buckskin horse which the deputy had used, and started for town."

"Well?"

"I arrived within about ten miles of town when a party of horsemen approached me. I recognized them as rather distant relatives of mine. They were led by Chief Juliano. I thought nothing of it and intended to proceed, but they spurred their horses toward me. Naturally I was somewhat puzzled. As they came nearer I heard Chief Juliano shout, 'Catch him!' Not knowing what it was all about, but knowing my distant relatives by reputation, I turned about and fled."

"What then?"

"They started shooting at me. Naturally, I was convinced that they intended to do me harm, so I raced my horse and soon drew away from all of them except a picked posse which has clung at my heels ever since."

"Gosh!" exploded the sheriff. "I've been in some funny messes, but this business beats 'em all. The more I go into it, the more it sounds like some lunatic asylum let loose! Where did these here relatives chase you to?"

"Well, I went into the Blue Hills and then circled around the Saugus mountains. Then I pushed for Clearwater, but I saw some relatives there and got out just in time. After that I doubled back and headed this way. If I couldn't get protection here, I expected to start for town again."

"Where's the rest of Juliano's gang?"

"I don't know."

The sheriff mopped his face with a blue bandanna and took an extra large bite of tobacco just as his roving eye caught a cloud of dust rising behind a shanty across the street. Within a minute six riders debouched into the street, holding rifles in their hands. They sighted Miles and the sheriff. They reined their horses to a slow trot and warily made their way to the small group at the fence, while other citizens began to congregate toward the center of excitement.

"Don't move!" commanded the leading horseman, a giant Indian buck known in town as Squint-Eye. "We want Johnny Miles! Hand him over!"

"No!" snarled Sheriff Bill, with the battle-light in his eyes. "Say, wadda you mean, comin' here like this? Who do you think you are? Hey? You fellers git off them hosses and put down them guns or I'll run you in jail! Come on, now! Hop!"

In an instant the sheriff was recognized by six pairs of eyes which had been intent only on Miles. The riders obeyed the snappy voice. In a trice they were off their horses.

"Now it's all right!" announced Squint-Eye, with apparent relief. "Sheriff's got him!"

This change of front gave Sheriff Bill another jolt. He blinked.

"Say—what are you talkin' about? Of course I've got him! I've got you, too! What's this all about?"

"He," said Squint-Eye, pointing at Miles, "run away from deputy. Juliano hear about it. Juliano say 'Now we catch'm for Sheriff Bill.' We get horses. We got out of town. We see Johnny Miles come bimeby. We try to catch Johnny Miles. Johnny Miles run away again. We chase'm. Now you catch him. All right."

"Yip!" exploded the sheriff. "Of all the —— —— fool goin's-on I ever saw, this here's the limit. Why, you pie-faced, dog-eatin', low-down son of a louse, Miles was tryin' to see me when you stopped him! You —— pin-headed idiot, you chased this man a hundred miles out of his way! What right has Juliano to horn into this business? Where's Juliano?"

"Blackwater," grunted the crestfallen Indian, naming a place thirty miles westward. "Deputy, he sick, Juliano nurse him."

"Nurse him? That old battle-ax? I'd as lief be nursed by a wild gorilla! What's Juliano nursing him for?"

"Juliano all right!" grunted Squint-Eye, angrily. "Good nurse. Deputy pretty near well!"

"Then I'll make him sick again!" promised Sheriff Bill. "Darn his hide, if he'd let Johnny Miles surrender in the first place, there wouldn't have been any trouble. Now look at the mess! I'm goin' to see McAndrews and Juliano! I reckon I'll have something to say to 'em! Come on you fellows! Git horses. We're goin' over to Blackwater!"

Sheriff Bill cast an ominous glance at the six Indians:

"You boneheads had better come along, too. Then I'll know where you are!"

THE shades of night were falling fast as the sheriff, his deputies, Miles, six sullen Indians and several assorted townspeople topped a sage-brush knoll and rode down into a little two-house settlement which stood alongside a well. Beyond the further house was what looked like a Gypsy camp, with dark-skinned men and women in red, blue, yellow and green shawls and blankets, squatting about a fire and eating their evening meal from tin cans.

At sight of the newcomers the campers arose. Some ran nervously toward their horses. Othere merely stood still. In the center of the latter crowd was Juliano. As he recognized the sheriff he held up a hand in the ancient sign of greeting.

There should have been a few polite formalities, but Sheriff Bill ignored them. He piled off his horse and approached the chief angrily just as McAndrews arose from a blanket and joined the crowd.

"Here!" snapped the sheriff. "What's the idea of these carryin's-on? Hey? What are you doin' with my deputy? Hey?"

Something of the old-time grandeur of a chief appeared in Juliano's wrinkled face as his head tilted back proudly.

"I rescue him. I take'm away from other Injuns. I fix'm up. I bring'm back to you."

"Yeh. A likely story! What did you chase Miles all over the country for?"

"Miles get away from deputy. I catch'm. I bring'm to you. Put'm in jail."

Sheriff Bill thought he knew Indians but this play was a new one. Old Juliano was entirely too virtuous. The dignified, self-satisfied, righteous manner of the old chief made Sheriff Bill gulp. He didn't know just how to meet it. He stared into the chief's somber eyes.

"Say," he demanded, "just what's got into you? Explain it. What's the idea?"

The old chief, still proudly erect, deigned to explain:

"Me Christian. Me good man. Preacher convert me. Tell me 'Do good.' All right. I try do good."

"Rats! You've gambled and smoked and lied and chewed and swore just like you used to! You can't give me any of that stuff about bein' converted! Not by a long shot!"

"Gamble, all right," maintained the chief, stolidly. "Smoke, all right. Swear, all right. Everything all right. But preacher say 'Do good, white man or Injun.' All right. I do good! I fight bad Injuns and take man away from 'em. I try catch Miles for you!"

"Yeh. You do good, all right. You've done so durned much good that the whole county's up in the air! Gosh!"

Suddenly Sheriff Bill thought he saw behind the whole business. His eyes lighted with the discovery.

"I see it now! Gosh, what a scheme! You hitched up religion, politics and revenge! You saw a chance to do good and get on the right side of the sheriff, and get even with some of your relatives! All in one swoop! Brains! Doggone your measly old hide, I'll give you credit. It's the only piece of common-sense I've seen in the whole fool affair!"

But the chief refused to accept it. He stood haughtily like a granite statue, scorning such aspersions on his character, his sincerity and single-mindedness.

"You lie!" he replied, coldly. "I do good. I try to help you. You say I think politics, revenge. You lie. I do good. I try to help you. Go to the ——!"

"I see," nodded Sheriff Bill, with his old sarcasm. "Now it's clear as daylight. It's a plain case of nobody home. It's just an old buzzard with one idea in his head. I get you. Nobody home. That's all. You'd better quit religion. Stay wicked. Then I'll understand you better."

He turned swiftly toward McAndrews and favored him with a vicious glare.

"As for you, that goes double. You

pinhead! Didn't I tell you to use tact when you went to Dry Lake? Tact! You're as tactful as a locomotive collision! You go back to the city! You belong in the county jail. I'll make you a guard. You can make speeches to the prisoners and they can't come back. Tact! Hump!"

Later, in the moonlight, Sheriff Bill led his cavalcade on the long trail toward Dry Lake, with Miles on one side of him and his favorite deputy on the other. The sheriff was sleepy. The calm light of the moon brought some peace and surcease to his soul. At length he spoke to the deputy, after a long silence. His voice was gentle now—

"Do you know who's the biggest chump of the lot?"

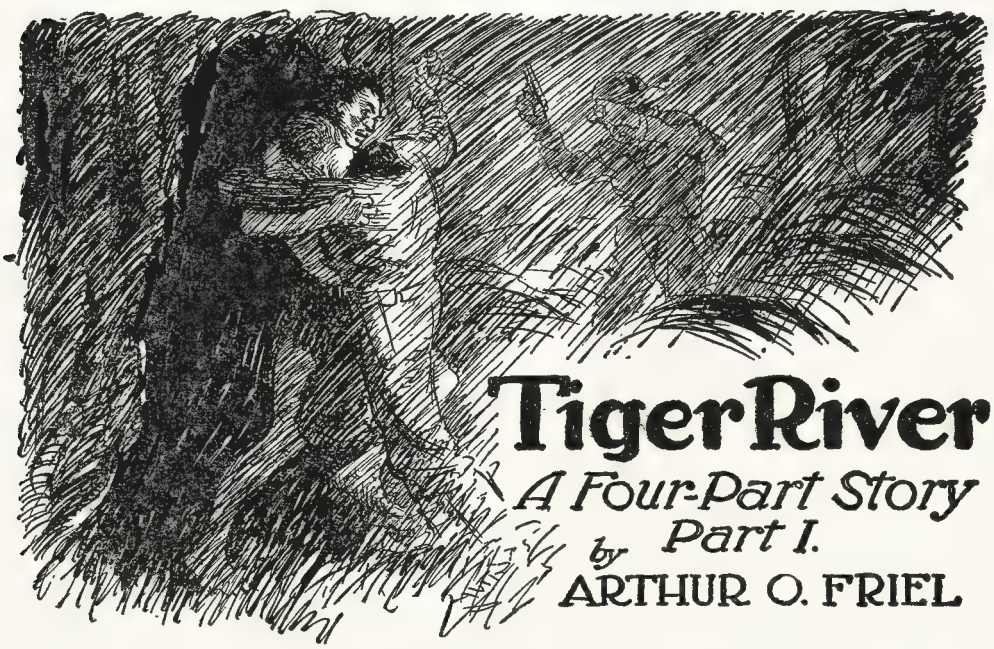
"No. There's too many to pick from."

"Well, it's me. I should never have chosen McAndrews to go to Dry Lake. Too thick in the head. I sort of knew it when I sent him. It's my fault. I'm as big a fool as the rest. It's a case of nobody home, all around!"

DOWN in Southern Texas the Reverend Gypsy Jones had just concluded a great revival and retired to his office-tent when a messenger thrust a telegram into his hand. The Reverend Gypsy Jones tore it open and read:

> Please do not convert any more aged Indians.
> (Signed) WILLIAM D. FRASER,
> Sheriff of Empire County.

"Now, I wonder what on earth he means by that?" asked the great revivalist.



Tiger River

A Four-Part Story

Part I.

by ARTHUR O. FRIEL

Author of "Black Hawk," "Tupahn—the Thunderstorm," etc.

CHAPTER I

WHERE WATERS MEET

AT THE edge of the jungle a rifle roared.

High up among the branches of a tall buttress-rooted tree—more than a hundred feet above the soggy ground—a big, red, bearded monkey lurched out into space. Headlong he fell. A swift rip of breaking underbrush, a dull thump, and he lay lifeless on the earth.

At the base of another tree a man quietly levered a fresh cartridge into his gun-barrel. For a few seconds he stood motionless, weapon up, eyes sweeping the surrounding tree-butts and bush-clumps. Then he let the rifle sink and, velvet-footed, stepped forward.

"So, Señor Cotomono," he said softly, "you will make your hideous howling, eh,

"*Tiger River*," *copyright, 1922, by Arthur O. Friel.*

to tell all the world that I am here? You will yell to the *tigres* of this Tiger Water to come and tear José Martinez, yes? Too late you learn that it does not pay to make too much noise with the mouth."

A sardonic smile played under his fierce black mustache. Even as the words slipped from his tongue his gaze lifted from the motionless animal and once more plumbed the vistas about him. Tall, sinewy, hawk-nosed, bold-eyed, red-kerchiefed, belted with a long machete, alert and wary as the great hunting-cat he had just mentioned—he looked a buccaneer chieftan marooned in a tropic wilderness, poised to fight man, beast, or demon.

A minute passed. No sound came to his ears except the ceaseless rustle of unseen small life, creeping about in the shadows during the hot hours of midday. With a lightning shift of manner he relaxed.

"Hah!" he growled. "José, you are over-careful. You have hardly left the Amazon—you have only just landed on the Tigre Yacu—and yet you stand as if you were far upstream and had shot a head-hunter instead of a poor *cotomono*. You disgust me, José *mio*. Come, little howler of the heights, and toast your toes at my fire."

In one motion he swooped up the dead monkey and whirled on his heel. A few strides to the rear, and he emerged at water—clear water, about seventy yards broad, flowing southeast, at whose margin floated a small canoe. Some rods downstream the limpid stream ended, merging into a turbid yellow flood rolling eastward—the mighty Amazon, here known as the Marañon.

Two swift glances he shot to right and left—one upstream, one out at the tawny monarch of rivers. Only empty water, glaring under the sun, met his gaze. Leaning his rifle against a handy tree-butt, he drew his machete and sliced some tindery bamboo into kindling. A few deft slashes with the same blade dressed the *cotomono** for roasting. Then, adding more fuel, he squatted and concentrated his attention on the cooking of his meal.

A stiff breeze came rocketing down the clear-water stream, snatching the smoke of his fire and flinging it playfully down to the great river. And almost at once, as if the tang of smoke and the savory odor of broiling meat had evoked life from the depths of that river, something came crawling into the yellow vacancy at the end of the jungle shores. Foot by foot, yard by yard, it nosed its clumsy way out of the west until its whole length floated there, only a little way from the land. There, for a moment, it hung motionless.

A grotesque, misshapen monster of the jungle, it seemed; a low-bodied thing some thirty feet long, with half a dozen short, rigid legs on each side; a humpy creature with a small square bump in the middle, a big round one at its tail, and more than a dozen smaller protuberances along its back. Presently its little legs moved backward, lifted, came forward—flashing glints of sunlight from its wet feet—and slid backward again. Its blunt nose turned up the clear water. It grew larger, crawling toward the spot whence the smoke streamed. And the rough little breeze, as if it had done its duty in summoning the river-beast, passed and was gone, leaving the smoke to rise straight above the squatting man like a telltale finger.

THE man did not see the thing approach. Around him grew waist-high grass, which now, in his doubled-up position, rose just above his head and shut off from his view all but the fire and his meat. The river-creature advanced quietly, as if a bit wary. Fifty feet off shore it paused. From it burst a roaring voice.

"Hey, there!"

The man in the grass started, spun about, lengthened himself toward his rifle, and in one second was behind the tree with gun cocked. His narrowed eyes stabbed through the sun-glare at the clumsy thing which had slipped up so smoothly within pistol-shot of him. In one tight squint he saw what it was.

A Peruvian *garretea*, or river-canoe, with a pile of supplies corded in the middle, a curve-roofed cabin at the stern, twelve copper-skinned paddlers and a steersman, and four khaki-shirted white men; that was the monster. The second glance of the lurking José told him that all the white men were deeply tanned and well bearded; that two of the beards were black, one yellow, and one unmistakably red. Then the voice spoke again.

"Come on out, feller. We ain't huntin' nobody. I see ye got a bandanna on yer

*The same monkey known as *guariba* in Brazil.

bean, so ye'd oughter be a white man. You savvy United States?"

The eyes of José widened.

"*Por Dios!*" he muttered. "Is it—it is not—yet the voice is the same! And a red beard——"

He stepped forth, rifle still ready but not aimed.

"*Si*, I savvy, *señor*," he answered. "Who comes?"

"Friends," clipped another voice. "Any objection to our tying up here? Want to sell that meat?"

"It is my dinner, *señor*, and not for sale," José answered coolly, still squinting at the boat. "Tying up here is as you wish. I do not own this river."

"All right. We'll shoot our own meat. Paddle!"

At the command the paddlers swayed in unison. The *garretea* floated nearer. Then out broke the first voice.

"Say, cap, lookit the guy! Ain't he a dead ringer for ol' Hozy, the lad that was with us last year on that there, now, Javaree River down below? By gosh, I wonder—Say, feller, mebbe this is a sassy question, but what's yer name?"

The speaker was the red-bearded, red-headed man; a broad-chested, muscular fellow whose blue eyes peered keenly from under a cupped hand and whose wide face glowed with eagerness. Into the hawk face of José flashed the light of certainty. His teeth gleamed and his rifle sank. In three strides he was at the water's edge.

"It is the Señor Tim!" he cried. "I thought—but I was not sure. And El Capitan McKay—Señor Knowlton—*si, yo soy, amigos!* It is I, José Martinez, at your service!"

"Well, by thunder!" laughed the blond man. "Welcome to our company, José, old top! I'll pump your arm off as soon as I can get out of this blooming boat. Give you a drink too—the occasion calls for a libation. Tim, break out a bottle of hooch."

"Right ye are, looey. Hozy, ol' sock, ye sure are a sight for sore eyes—bokoo jolly, tray beans, like them frogs use to say in France. Oo-la-la! Look out there, ye gobs! Timmy Ryan is landin', toot sweet."

And land he did—crowding between the Indian paddlers and launching himself over the bow as it touched shore. As his boots plunked into the mud his right hand seized that of José and wrung it in a mighty grip.

"Ye ol' son-of-a-gun!" he chuckled. "Ye ol' slashin', tearin', hip-shootin' death's-head! Jest as homely and full o' cussedness as ever, ain't ye! Mind the time we blowed them Red Bone cannibals all to glory? Gosh, that was a reg'lar scrap, I'll tell the world!"

"I remember it well," laughed José. "But you need not break my hand, *amigo*. The Señor Knowlton seems to wish to use it."

The blond man too had landed, and now he shouldered the exuberant Tim aside and proceeded to make good his promise to pump the Spaniard's arm, giving him a running fire of banter the while. After him, cool and unhurried, came a tall, black-bearded, wide-shouldered man whose set face and bleak gray eyes now were softened by a welcoming smile. Last of all debarked a stocky man of medium height, with hat pulled well down over his brow.

In contrast to the red Tim and the blond Knowlton, the blackbeard spoke no word as his hand grasped that of José; but his brief, hearty grip and direct gaze spoke what his tongue did not. And to him José gave a look and a tone of deeper respect than that accorded his predecessors.

"*Capitan!*" he bowed. Then, as their hands parted, he turned suddenly away. When he swung back his bold eyes were a trifle misty and his smile strained.

"Pardon the weakness, *señores*," he said. "It is sudden, this meeting. And there are few men who care to take the hand of José Martinez, outlaw—though there are many who would take his head."

"Grrrumph! Let 'em come and git it—they'll have a fat time bumpin' ye off while this gang's here, Hozy!" erupted Tim. "We don't give a tinker's damn if ye're a dozen outlaws. Ye're a square guy and ye've got no yeller streak, and we dang well know it. Besides which, there ain't no law in this neck o' the woods, unless they've lugged some in since the last time we was here, which I sure hope they ain't. They's too much law in the world now, most of it made by crooks. But say, ain't ye got a word for Dave Rand here? Ye'd oughter remember him."

He motioned toward the last man ashore, who stood impassively waiting.

"Rand?" echoed José. "Señor Rand I do not— Ho! *Por Dios!* Is this the man who was the Raposa—the Wild Dog of the Javary?"

"The same," answered Rand himself. As he spoke he lifted his broad hat, revealing green-gray eyes and dark hair in which an odd white mark stood out above one ear.

"The man who was a crazy captive of the Red Bone Indians," he went on, "and whom you last saw as a naked, painted wreck being dragged home to the States by McKay and Knowlton and Tim here. No wonder you didn't recognize me this time. Shake?"

"Indeed yes, *señor*, with pride." And the final handshake was completed. "But how come you here in South America again—and, of all places, on the banks of this dangerous water? You had best move on quickly, comrades, all of you."

Tim interrupted.

"Aw, who's scairt of a li'l brook like this? And say, feller, yer meat's burnin'. Git out o' me way and I'll save it. We got to eat."

José wheeled, pounced, retrieved the blackened meat, and gazed at it ruefully.

"A third of my dinner gone," he grumbled. "But this *cotomono* was a big one, and we can each get a few mouthfuls of fresh meat from him. Your Indians can find meat of their own if they will hunt back from the water."

But the Indians seemed to want no meat. They did not even show any intention of landing. Every man of them had remained in the boat, and, though they sniffed wistfully at the odor of the cooking, their eyes were continually watching the thick tropical tangle near at hand. Uneasy mutterings went among them, and repeatedly they grunted two words—

"Tigre Yacu."

The northerners stared at them. José, the jungle-rover, alone seemed to understand. He gave the paddlers a brief glance, nodded, and let his own gaze go roving upstream.

"What ails them guys?" wondered Tim. "Is this place ha'nted or somethin'?"

"This, Señor Tim, is the Tiger Water," José explained, "and it is bad country. Above here——"

He stopped abruptly. Across his words smote a dread sound.

From the jungle behind them broke a coughing roar; a hoarse, harsh, malignant note of menace which struck both red and white men like a blow. It was the voice of the South American tiger, savage king of the jungle, eater of men; the voice of the Tigre Yacu, on whose banks lurked unknown things; the voice of Death.

CHAPTER II

THE RIVER OF MISSING MEN

FOR A moment the jungle and the river were still. No man moved; and the rustle of small things in bush and branches was hushed as if all life held its breath. Then, calmly, the tall Captain McKay spoke.

"Sounds hungry. A hungry jaguar is bad medicine. Get aboard, men, and we'll shove out a little. Come along, José I want to talk to you."

José glowered into the tangle as if half minded to go seeking the *tigre*. But when Knowlton seconded the invitation he shrugged and nodded.

"Climb in," said the blond man. "Nothing to stay here for. The Indians won't come ashore, your meat is cooked, and we can talk better where that brute can't drop on somebody's back. Besides," with a laugh, "we have to dig up that bottle I spoke of."

"Your last reason is much the best one, *señor*," José grinned. "Now that I think of it, my throat is most dry."

Back into the *garretea* the white men clambered, and at once the paddlers shoved off. But for McKay's sharp commands, they would have driven the boat back to the Amazon. As it was, they reluctantly stopped work after a few strokes, and a moment later a sixty-pound weight plunged over the bow. Fifteen yards out, the boat swung at anchor.

Four of the whites went aft to the shelter of the shady hoop-roofed cabin, which rose importantly from a ten-foot palm-bark deck. Tim, the fifth, halted amidships and sought something among the supplies, straightening up presently with a quart bottle on which the Indians fixed a longing gaze. Not until the red-bearded man entered the cabin did the aborigines take their eyes from his liquid treasure. Then they silently moved forward and made a fire in a big clay pot in the bow—the "galley" of their crude ship.

"Wal, Hozy, old-timer, here's how!" proclaimed Tim, flourishing the bottle. "Reg'lar stuff, this is—some o' that there, now, Annie Sadder, double-distilled and a

hundred proof. Take a husky gargle of it before ye eat—ye git more of a jolt on an empty stummick. Shoot!"

José shot. The *anisado* gurgled down his throat like water. When he handed back the bottle his eyes glistened and a fourth of the liquor had disappeared from mortal view.

"Gosh!" muttered Tim. "Half a pint to one swaller! Ye got me beat. But I'll do me best."

Measuring off another half-pint with a thumb-nail, he opened his capacious mouth, nipped his nose between his free thumb and forefinger, and let the bottle gurgle. Presently he gasped, shot the bottle to McKay, seized a long-handled gourd, and seemed to dive overboard; but his legs and body remained on the deck, and the gourd came up full of river-water. Several gulps, and he rose, breathing hard.

"That's what we come up here for, anyways—clean water," he alibied. "So I'm gittin' mine now. That Ammyzon water is awright if ye let it settle, but she sure needs some settlin'. Don't ye want a chaser too, Hozy? No? Then eat somethin' quick, before ye git vi'lent. We don't want to have to fight ye."

But José only grinned and licked his mustache, bowing to Knowlton as the latter saluted him with the bottle and took a short pull. McKay drank without a quiver. Rand barely touched the glass to his lips, then replaced the cork.

"Hard case, this feller Rand," winked Tim. "Last time he got holt of a bottle he swallered the whole dang thing and then chewed the cork for a chaser. Right after that he sat down hard and the bottle busted inside him, so he has to go easy a few days. If ye don't believe me, kick him, and ye'll hear the glass jingle."

"You'll be more likely to hear the angels singing," countered the green-eyed man, with a tight smile. "The fact is, Joe, I'm not drinking any more. Drink got me into —— once. Maybe you remember."

The Peruvian nodded.

"*Si.* It was drinking which got you into a fight at Manaos some years ago when you were traveling up the Amazon. You struck down a man—a German—so hard that you believed him killed, and you hid on a steamer and fled up the river. Then you went into the wild cannibal country on the Rio Javary, fought another German—Schwandorf—who tried to make you steal Indian women for his slave trade, and were shot in the head by that man. The bullet crazed you, and for years you wandered among the cannibals, who let you live only because they feared you—the Raposa—the Wild Dog of the jungle! I heard of you long before I ever saw you."

"And if it hadn't been for Mac and Merry Knowlton and Tim, who came hunting me and knocked sense back into my head with a gun-butt, I'd be there yet," Rand acquiesced grimly.

José nodded again.

"*Es verdad.* But that time is past, and you are a strong man once more. Yet I am much astonished to see you again in the jungle. If I have it right, these *señores* came seeking you because you were heir to a great estate and they were commissioned to find you. A North American millionaire is the last kind of man I should expect to see here, even if he had not once suffered here as you have."

Rand smiled wryly.

"But I don't happen to be a millionaire. I haven't even a million cents, not to mention dollars."

"*Por Dios!* There were two million dollars—did you not say so, *capitan?* And that was hardly a year ago! How have you spent so much money in so short a time?"

"Didn't spend a cent of it. Never had it to spend. It's this way:

"My uncle, Philip Dawson, died. His son, Paul, who fought in the great war, was supposed to have been killed in action in the Argonne Forest. So the Dawson estate was legally mine—for a while.

"But Paul wasn't killed. He was badly wounded, captured, and treated none too well; and he got aphasia—forgot who he was. The War Department mixed up things, recorded him as dead, and shipped home the body of some other soldier as his. A lot of those blunders happened in the war.

"Just about the time these chaps were finding me down here, a friend of Paul's found him over there. He was working as a field hand, and even thought he was a German—he had traveled a lot as a boy and could talk German as easily as English; so when he found himself among German people and didn't know who he was or how he came there, he thought he belonged there. Of course his friend got him back to the States at once, and by the time I showed

up he was there in the hands of some specialists who were getting his memory back for him. So that let me out."

José carved a section of monkey-haunch. Slicing it with careful exactness, he passed portions to each of his companions. All fell to chewing.

"But I thtill do not thee, *theñor*," lisped José then, his mouth nearly full, "why you return to thith plathe."

"We're partners, chasing the rainbow," vouchsafed Knowlton after swallowing his morsel. "We three were well rewarded for getting Dave back, even though he wasn't the heir; the estate had to make good its contract with us. Dave wasn't broke, either—he had some money of his own in a couple of banks. So we got restless, pooled our money, and came down to the Andes to make ourselves billionaires by finding the treasures of the Incas or anything else lying around loose.

"But we were out of luck. We poked around the upper Marañon awhile and tried a couple of other prospects, but got nothing but hard knocks. So we got this boat and came along down. Thought we'd take a whirl at the Napo country, just below here. Loads of gold in the Napo, we hear, Indians pick it out of the river-bed, and so on. Want to join us and try your luck?"

José did not answer at once. His black eyes searched the face of each man as if seeking some sign of derision or amusement. He found none.

"You jest, *señor*," he said presently.

"Not a bit of it. What do you say, Rod—Tim—Dave? Is José a welcome member of this gang?"

"I'll say he is!" rumbled Tim.

The other two nodded decisively.

The Peruvian's face glowed. But he shook his head.

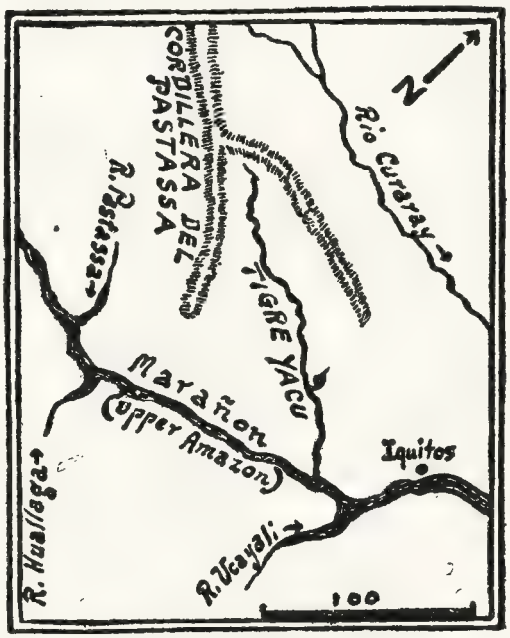
"I thank you, *señores*, but I can not. I have no such outfit as you; I have no money; I am not one of you, but José Martinez—outlaw. I could not be on equal footing——"

"That's rot, José," McKay cut in. "If we didn't want you we wouldn't ask you. Money and outfit are immaterial. You have something we lack—intimate knowledge of this region. Put your knowledge in the pot with our outfit, and you owe nothing. Coming in?"

Again José held his tongue before answering.

PRIDE gleamed in José's eyes, but those eyes went up the Tiger River as if visioning something the others could not see. Absently he rolled and smoked a cigaret. Not until he snapped the charred butt overboard did he speak.

"*Señores*," he said abruptly, "the tale of gold in the Napo is old. Too old. Everybody knows it. True, gold is there; gold-dust washed from the Llanganati mountains of Ecuador. But men have known of it for hundreds of years. Many expeditions have gone in after it. Some have come out; some have not. Savages—accidents—fever—there are many white men's bones



THE LAND OF THE HEADHUNTERS

in the Napo jungle. There will be many more.

"Gold is there, yes. But why journey to the Napo, and hundreds of miles up the Napo—it is eight hundred miles long, *amigos*—to seek a thing which is nearer at hand? Why poke about a river where the workings are known and covered by fighting men, when before you opens a stream where you can take anything you find?"

The Americans started. Their glances darted up the Tigre Yacu.

"You mean—" Knowlton began.

"*Sssstl*" hissed José warningly.

Two of the crew were approaching, bearing salt fish and hot coffee to their *patrones*.

The Peruvian eyed them narrowly, but none gave sign of having heard or understood the talk. Stolidly they placed the food on the raised deck, turned, and went back to the bow.

"Speak on," said McKay. "They know no English except a few words like 'paddle' and so on."

"*Bueno.* You guess it—I mean this Tigre Yacu.

"Behold, *amigos.* It is but a little brook, yes, if one thinks of the great Marañon or the Napo. Yet it runs a long way up—one hundred fifty miles or more—and it is deep; canoes can travel far on it. And it heads between two long mountain spurs, which form the split end of the Cordillera del Pastassa. And that cordillera, comrades, is itself a spur from those same Llanganati mountains whence comes the gold of the Napo and its tributary river, the Curaray!

"See. It is thus."

Dipping a finger into his coffee, he drew on the bark deck a figure somewhat like a crude, elongated letter "h." Between the legs of this symbol he traced another line running southeast.

"The long line is the Cordillera del Pastassa, the curved one its spur," he explained. "And the third line is this Tigre Yacu. North of this cordillera runs the Curaray, which, as I say, bears gold. Some of its tributaries flow from this cordillera. Who shall say that the cordillera, an offshoot of the Llanganati, is not bursting with gold? Who shall say that much—or all—of the gold of the Curaray does not come from this cordillera instead of the Llanganati? *Madre de Dios! Quien sabe?*"

His face was flaming now. And, looking into his hot black eyes, the blue and the gray and the green eyes of the northerners suddenly flared with the reckless light of the gold-lure. Rainbow-chasers all, hardy, venturesome, fearless, they were of that red-blooded breed which plunges straight into the jaws of death if within those jaws lies a prize worth the daring. In one flashing instant the projected journey to the Napo vanished from their minds like wind-blown mist. The Napo was old. The Tigre Yacu, unknown, mysterious, had caught them in a spell.

It was McKay, canny and controlled, who spoke first.

"If there's gold here, why has it been passed by?"

One laconic word answered him.

"Jiveros."

"Hm. The head-hunters! Thought we were past their country."

"Oof! The Jiveros?" blurted Tim. "The fellers that shrink yer head to the size of an orange? Them guys?"

"Them guys," José echoed with a slight smile. "Their country is farther west, as *el capitan* says—the rivers Pastassa, Morona, Santiago; but they know no boundaries and they roam far. It is more than possible that even now some of them lurk yonder in the bush, watching us. Wise men do not go up these rivers west of the Napo—only fools like José.

"That was why I hesitated so long before telling you of the treasure that may be up the stream. To risk my own life is nothing; to lure my friends into a death-trap with me is much. But—we were together among the southern cannibals not so long ago. So I tell you."

He gulped some coffee. At once he went on:

"Nor is that all. Somewhere up this stream is something—I know not what—which makes men mad. I am not the first fool who has thought of gold up here and gone after it. How many men have gone in here I know not. But until recently no man has come out.

"Two weeks ago came one Rafael Gonzales down to Iquitos. A hard, reckless man he was, a killer and other things. I say he was. He is not.

"Months ago he went up this Tigre Yacu, boasting that he feared no man, beast, God or devil. Days ago he came back naked, bearded, filthy, raving. But with him he brought gold. A hide bag he had, and it was heavy with nuggets. Yes, nuggets, not dust. His skin was seamed with scars like those of a whip. His toes were gone—every one cut off. How he walked through the jungle, how he lived without weapons, I do not know. But he came—and he brought gold."

"Did any one learn what he had been through?" asked Rand.

"No. He was utterly mad. He screamed frightful things, but such as made no sense. Then some one stole his gold. When he found it gone he ran about yelling, fell down frothing, and died."

For a long minute there was silence. All peered up the stream. The flush of excitement had died from their faces, but no

indecision or fear showed in them. Their jaws were set and their eyes narrowed as if they were sizing up an enemy. And they were. In each man's mind flamed a challenge to the river of missing men.

Then, all at once, their heads jerked to the right. The Indians in the bow had risen from their squat and were facing toward the spot where the Peruvian's little fire had smoked, and where his canoe still lay. The blaze now had died. And through the waist-high grass something large, something stealthy, was creeping from the jungle.

CHAPTER III

THE CONQUISTADOR

READY rifles slid out from the cabin. From four of them sounded the quiet snicks of safeties being thrown off. The hammer of José's big-bulleted repeater clicked dully and poised at full cock.

"The shot is mine, *amigos*," he reminded them.

So, of the five guns, his was the only one to take aim.

The telltale grass stood still. For a breathless minute no sign of movement was visible. Slowly then it swayed again above the creeping thing, marking another few inches of advance.

Crash!

José's muzzle jumped. Blue smoke drifted along the water. The grass shook. From it burst a screech of appalling fury.

The dense growth of green split. At the water's edge a great black cat-creature poised, eyes glaring, fangs gleaming, tail thrashing the grass like a maddened snake. On one ebony shoulder a streak of red flowed and widened.

"Hah-yah!" mocked José, his own teeth bared in a tigerish snarl. "Here am I, you devil! Come to me!"

The devil came.

In one leap it shot ten feet from the bank. Its big paws, with long claws unsheathed, commenced swimming almost before its powerful body splashed. Eyes fixed in malevolent hate on the man who had wounded and mocked it, teeth still bared in a soundless snarl, the brute lunged straight for the boat.

From the Indians broke guttural gasps of fear. From the white men sounded short growls. From four high-power rifles cracked whip-like reports. From the Peruvian's black-powder gun another blunt roar thumped out.

The black tiger, suddenly motionless, sank in a red welter.

"Guess it was just as well we did our talking out here," Knowlton observed. "Sorry to horn into your party, José, but I just had to slam a bullet into that fellow."

"It is nothing, *señor*. I had first blood—and last." Then, grinning, he added: "I have made a good beginning on the Tigre Yacu. I have shot a black tiger and a *curaca*."

"*Curaca?* A chief? How come?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That is my little joke. *Curaca* means an Indian chief. But the male *cotomono* monkey, with his long beard, also is called *curaca*. You have just eaten some of my chief-monkey."

"Uumph! Feller's got to be eddicated to git these here South American jokes," muttered Tim. "So I been chewin' a chief's leg, hey? 'Twas tough stuff, anyways."

"If you go up this stream with me, Señor Tim, you may have to eat worse things before you come out," was the significant reply. "But our coffee cools. Let us finish it."

Back in the shade of the cabin the five chewed and sipped in the silence of thought. When nothing but bare bones and empty gourds remained and tobacco was burning, Knowlton reached to a peg at one side, took hown a roll of rubberized fabric, extracted a number of maps, and spread one on the bark floor. After a moment of study he nodded.

"Your cordillera starts from the Llanganati, all right," he said. "And it splits into spurs, with the Tigre starting between them. Guess this country has been explored."

"I think not, *señor*," José differed.

"Then how would the map-makers know what was in there?"

"How do I know what is in there?" the jungle-rover countered. "Because I have talked with Indians who know. Canoemen of the Napo, they were, whom I met on the Amazon. Is it not quite likely that the maps were made by men who never have been here, but who have taken the word of others who in turn had asked Indians?"

The blond Northerner was silenced. But presently he added:

"Well, see here. The map agrees with you as to the mountains, but it gives this

country east of the Cordillera del Pastassa to the Zaparos, not the Jiveros. The Jiveros are west of the Rio Pastassa."

A faint smile twitched the Spanish mouth.

"*Si?* That is a great relief, *señor*. Now we can go on without caution. If we meet Jiveros and they seek to cut off our heads, behold, we shall show them that map and tell them they have no right here, and they will go speeding back to the Pastassa, *desde luego*."

Tim snickered. McKay and Rand smiled broadly. Knowlton flushed, laughed in a vexed way, and shoved the map back among the others.

"Faith, bein' an army officer gits a feller into lots o' bad habits," remarked Tim. "These two guys, Hozy, was officers in the big war, ye see; Cap was a real cap'n and li'l ol' Blondy Knowlton was me looey—lieutenant. Course, they had to use maps a lot, and them maps o' Europe are right; everything's jest like the map says, except mebbe the enemy. So looey got so used to believin' the map he ain't quite got out o' the habit yet. But, say, what kind o' guys are them there—uh—whaddye call 'em, looey?"

"Zaparos."

José waved a contemptuous hand.

"Animals. Wandering beasts of the forest, nothing more. They are short, flat of nose, with little eyes set slanting in their heads. They can not count above ten, and for any number above three they must use their fingers. They have no towns, make only flimsy huts, live apart from each other in any place they like, then move on elsewhere. The only thing they make is the hammock; they are the hammock-makers of the Provincia del Oriente. Oh, I was forgetting—they make also a drink called *ayahuasca;* but it is the stupid drink of a stupid people, which only makes one sleep. They are not even interesting. There is no danger from them."

"Uh-huh. Wal, what about the head-shrinkin' fellers? They sure oughter be interestin'."

The outlaw smiled grimly.

"You have said it, Señor Tim. There, *amigos*, is a race of men! Never have they been conquered. Neither my people of Spain nor the old Incas before us could make them bend their necks. They are fighters—fighters like my own ancestors, who, *por Dios*, were no such sleek pot-bellied politicians as the men of Peru now have become! And though I do not intend to lose my head to any man, and will fight like ten —— to keep it, if it must be lost I would rather give it to the warriors of the Jiveros than to the sneaking, foot-lapping police of my own race. *Sí!*"

His swarthy face, tanned deep by years of jungle sun, twisted in sudden savage bitterness. Abruptly he shot up to his full height, took a pantherish step, whirled, gazed slit-eyed at the four who had made him their partner.

"LISTEN to me!" he rasped. "I, José Martinez, am of the Conquistadores! In me runs the blood of a man who dared the seas—dared the Andes—dared the jungle—and made this a land of Spain! But for him and his comrades, what would this Peru—that Ecuador—Colombia, Venezuela, the accursed Chile, Argentina—what would they be today? Indian lands. The strong hand, the cold steel, the fire and blood of my fathers, won all this great country.

"And what are their sons today? *Perros amarillos!* Yellow dogs! Dogs who yelp out from among them like a wild beast, a man who still has the strength of his ancestors—dogs who hide behind their police—dogs who fight only with cunning and treachery and law, law, law!

"The Conquistadores were heroes, because they fought and killed. I am an outlaw, because I have fought and killed. Yet never have I killed a man who would not kill me. Not that I have always waited to be attacked—else I should be dead, long since. I have seen the death in a man's eye and I have acted. So I live. But I live with a price on my head. Why? Because I first killed a greasy politician, beyond the mountains, who had sent hired tools to murder me because he wanted my woman——"

He broke off short and struggled for control. But the flood of his fury burst forth again.

"The slime! The crawling scum! I killed him—*sí!*—and his paid assassins too I killed. Hah! But he was a politician—a maker of laws. His brother makers-of-laws lashed the police—the army—all of Peru—on my trail. So am I an outlaw.

"*Buenol* So be it. I am a man. I am among men. If I lose my head to these

Jiveros I lose it to men. And my bones will rest quiet, and my shrunken head hanging in a Jivero hut will grin at men—fighting men!"

His chin lifted sharply, and his eyes blazed at the farther shore. As if he saw Jiveros there, he did grin—a hard, deadly grin. And the four North Americans, silent, watched him level-eyed and knew he spoke truth.

Piratical, flamboyant, fiery and fearless, he needed only a coat of mail and a sword to become the reincarnation of the long-dead conquerors whose iron will and bloody deeds had crushed a continent. He was a man born too late to live in the Peru beyond the mountains; but here in *el Oriente,* where the quick hand and the ready steel still ruled, he was at home. In him blazed the same flame that had burned in the veins of Pizarro, Orellana, Aguirre, and their bold and violent followers; and it would drive him up this Tigre Yacu, to gold or to death, as it had driven them into the dread jungles of the Napo and the Huallaga.

Slowly the fire in his face died out. At length, with a shrug, he turned back to them.

"But you would hear of those Jiveros, not of José," he deprecated. "Something of them and their habits you must have learned before now, but I will speak what comes to my mind.

"They too are wanderers, like the Zaparos; but in no other way are they like those sluggish ones, and even in their wanderings they differ. Instead of miserable palm-leaf shelters separated one from another, they build at a chosen place two or three strong houses of logs standing on end, each house holding fifty or more people, and a tower for use in fighting enemies who attack them. When they move to another place all go together; and they move every few months, no matter how good the place where they are. It is in their blood, *señores;* they can no more live years in one spot than a *tigre* can make himself a house-cat.

"Often they move back to some other place where they have been before and where their old houses wait, but it is not always so. Many times they go on and build new fortresses and plant new crops. And when the drive to go grows too strong to be satisfied by this moving about, they strike out in fierce raids far from their old homes, killing all men who block their way.

"They fight with the poisoned arrow, the spear, the club, and sometimes with ax and knife and gun. In times of peace they trade rubber and gold for steel weapons—at Macás and Canélos and Loja—but they are so often at war that they can not keep themselves in ammunition. So they do not depend much on their guns. And one of the big tribes of the Jiveros—the Huambisas of the Santiago—will seldom trade with the whites, so they have no guns, except those taken from white men killed while hunting gold in their region. But they need none. Their own weapons are more than enough."

"Yeah," nodded Tim. "Specially that there poison that kills ye if the arrer only scratches ye. Same kind o' stuff them Mayor Rooney cannibals over east use, I s'pose. Do they eat yer hands and feet, like them Rooney lads?"

Knowlton leaned back and cackled.

"Mayorunas, Tim, not Rooneys," he corrected. "They're not Irish."

"Wal, that's what I said, ain't it? Mayor Rooneys. And it ain't their fault they ain't Irish. They sure can fight."

"You are right and wrong, Señor Tim," José smiled. "The Jiveros use that same poison, as you guessed. But they are not cannibals. All they do to you after you are dead is to shrink your head, and perhaps braid your hair into a belt made from the hair of other slain men. The Jivero who kills you, *amigo,* will surely put your red hair into his girdle. It will shine brightly among the black strands."

"Yeah? Wal, feller, unless he gits me from behind he'll sure find he's got a two-handed job givin' me that haircut. What kind o' lookin' guys are they? Reg'lar tough-mugs, prob'ly, that smell out loud."

"But no, *amigo.* They are most clean, and take much care of themselves. They bathe themselves often, and whatever thing they get from a white man they wash at once. The one thing of which they have fear is disease, for many of their people have died of smallpox and measles and other ills caught while trading at towns; so they are suspicious of all things belonging to strangers until washed.

"Many of them are light of skin and have beards, with faces like those of Spaniards burned by sun. It may even be that some Spanish blood is in the veins of such men. I have heard that long ago—three hundred

years or more—the Jiveros and the Spaniards fought a bitter war in which the white men were swept out of this land, and the wives of those Spaniards had to become the women of the Indian conquerors. If that be true, the Spanish children born to those women after capture would grow up as Jiveros. It may be so—I know not. But I do know this—that up this very Tigre Yacu are white Indians!

"The Yámeos, they are. White Indians who are restless rovers; they even cross the great Marañon and journey hundreds of miles southward up the Ucayali. Little is known of them. But it is known that they are white."

"Maybe more will be known about them when we come out," commented Rand.

"*Si*—when we come out. Many things may be known about this river—when we come out. But before coming out we must go in. Yes? No?"

There was a short pause. Captain McKay's keen gray gaze plumbed each face. Then he perfunctorily suggested——

"Contrary-minded, vote no."

Instead, his three mates nodded. José smiled.

"It seems that I am to have company," he observed.

"Seems like this game has swapped ends," Tim grinned. "Li'l while ago we thought we was electin' ye; now ye're adoptin' us. Wal, le's go."

"Not so fast," José demurred. "There must be a new boat. And fewer men."

"Correct," approved McKay. "Boat's too big. Indians won't go up here. Got to shake them and paddle our own canoe. But can we get a smaller craft?"

"I think so, *capitan*. Just below here is a small settlement; San Regis. It is not much—a few huts on the bank, that is all—but canoes are there. No doubt you can make a trade. But—no word of where we go, comrades."

"Sure," agreed Knowlton. "This little cruise is strictly private. All aboard for San Regis, then. *Popero!*"

In answer to the summons, the steersman arose from the group of Indians still clustered around the cooking-pot. His mates, facing aft, watched and listened. Sullen dread lest they be commanded to go farther up the Tigre Yacu was stamped plain on their faces.

"*Abajo*. Down-stream," McKay ordered.

The face of the *popero* lit up. The sulky expressions of the paddlers vanished. With monkey-like agility the steersman swung himself atop the cabin roof. Eagerly the others turned to haul up the crude anchor. When its wet bulk glistened again in the bow they scrambled to their places in haste to be gone.

"I think, *amigos*, I will await you here," said José, as the big craft began to surge around. "If you will land me——"

"Hitch your canoe astern with our own *montaria*," Knowlton interposed. "We'll all get plenty of paddling soon. Take it easy while you can."

"Ah, yes. But it may be as well for you if I am not seen with you. I am not well known up here, more than three hundred miles above the Javary, but a bad name travels far."

"Rot!" snapped McKay. "You're our partner. That's enough. Unless, of course, you'd rather not run the risk——"

"Ho! Risk? José Martinez skulks from no town, *capitan!* Who would imprison me must first take me."

His fierce mustache bristled, and his right hand tapped the hilt of a knife under his waistband. McKay nodded shortly.

"Then you ride here," was his curt answer.

A word to the steersman, and the *garretea* swung shoreward. Tim, grabbing a length of fiber cord, clambered to the extreme stern. While every Indian eye anxiously searched the grass and the trees, the big boat halted at the bank long enough to allow the hitching of the Peruvian's canoe beside the little skiff of the voyagers. Then it sheered off and slid away toward the yellow water below.

CHAPTER IV

THE POWER OF GOLD

OUT into the turbid flood of the continental stream plowed the long boat. There the paddlers settled themselves for their regular long-distance stroke. Hardly had they begun to sweat, however, before their tall *capitan* ordered them to swerve toward a cleared space on the high left bank, where the peaked roofs of a few dingy clay houses showed against the encompassing wall of jungle.

Bewilderment showed in their brown faces

as they glanced back toward the cabin, but they obeyed without hesitation. Once more on the broad Marañon, with the demon-water of the Tigre left behind, whatever the white men said was right.

Into a sizable cove below the village they floated. Up ahead, sheltered by the land from the power of the giant of waters, a number of canoes lay at the shore; and from them a crude footpath—hardly more than a gully in the clay—rose to the village. Down that path were coming a couple of wooden-faced Indians, shirtless but wearing tattered breeches, and as the *garretea* slowed to a stop they also stopped, staring.

"Umph. We don't git no four-man boat here," declared Tim, after a glance among the meager stock of canoes.

"A couple of three-man dugouts will do," said Knowlton. "Put two men in each and split the outfit. There's one three-man boat over yonder. Looks good, too. Find another and we're fixed."

But finding the other was not so easily done. The others all were too small—all, that is, except one hulking craft at the end of the line, which bore a striking resemblance in size and shape to the *garretea* of the adventurers. At this José scowled.

"We come at a bad time," he muttered. "Traders are here. Ho, *Indios!* Whose boat is that?"

The staring pair on the footpath did not answer. One mumbled growlingly to the other, and they resumed their downward way, turning, at the bottom, toward the long boat.

"——" snarled the Peruvian, his eyes snapping. "Put me ashore, *capitan!* I will put tongues in the heads of the surly dogs!"

McKay, unspeaking, motioned shoreward. The *popero* grunted, and the paddlers sank their blades.

"Go easy, José," Knowlton cautioned. "We come here to trade, not to fight."

"*Es verdad.* But let these Indians escape with their insolence, and what trade should we make?"

Without awaiting a reply, he made a flying leap to the stern of a dugout near at hand; landed cat-footed, and in three more bounds was ashore. Fierce face shoved forward, red kerchief flaring sinister, in the sun, he strode at the two Indians.

One of them, cowed by the truculence of the outlaw's eye, gave back. The other stood his ground and dropped a hand to the hilt of a machete. The menace of his attitude was plain. But José did not honor him by drawing his own steel.

His open hand shot out, the heel of it smacking sharply on the coppery jaw. The Indian went down as if slugged by a clenched fist.

"Whose boat is that?" rasped the son of the Conquistadores again.

The second Indian, cringing, answered promptly this time.

"Maldonado, from Moyobamba, *señor.*"

"Moyobamba!" José spat the word as if it were a curse. "You are his man? Why in ten —— did you not answer when I called? Where is that accursed Moyobambino master of yours?"

The man retreated another step, blinking with fear, and pointed a hand up the bank.

"So. He shall soon see me. And you, you dog—when next a white man speaks to you, answer at once and civilly! If you do not— Ho! You on the ground, who said you could get up? Down, you misborn whelp!"

With which he lifted one bare foot, jammed it into the face of the rising man, and slammed him down again. Whereafter he gave him a tongue-lashing lurid with oaths and picturesque threats, the last of which was that if he moved before he was whistled to he would have his bowels cut out and tied around his neck. With a final glare at both of them, José spun about and stalked back to the Americans, who now had landed.

"Their master is a sneaking Moyobambino trader, *un tal* Maldonado," he announced. "If you know not the Moyobambinos, learn now that they are cheating, lying, thieving dogs, known from Lima to Para for their rascally tricks. Their one thought is money. If one of them heard that a dead man with three *pesetas* in his pocket lay rotting on the shore, he would not rest until he had smelled out the corpse and torn the money from it. Such is the Moyobambino."

"Seems to me I've heard of those fellows," said Knowlton. "They're called 'the tight-wads of the Andes.'"

"Just so, *teniente.* A tight-wad can sometimes be trusted—a Moyobambino never.

"One of the worst massacres on this Marañon was caused by one of those curs.

It was at Santa Teresa, between the rivers Santiago and Morona—a town which exists no more.

"A party of bold young men from the Rio Mayo determined to seek gold on the Santiago, though that is the country of the fierce Huambisas. They started up the Marañon to carry out their plan. But there was a dirty dog of a Moyobambino trader, one Canuto Acosta, to whom some of the Santa Teresans owed a little gold-dust; and he was worried lest the coming of the gold-hunters might spoil his chance of collecting his paltry debt. So he scurried up the river ahead of them and reached the little town just as a big party of Huambisas came in from the Santiago to trade.

"To these bloody savages he said that a great army of white men was coming up the river to crush their tribe and make them slaves. The Huambisas at once killed every man in the town—forty and seven of them—and carried away sixty women as their slaves. They left alive only two boys, whom they put on a raft and sent down the river to tell the gold-hunters they would kill them also if they came on. So, *señores*, one hundred and seven people went to death or misery because of one lying Moyobambino."*

"Huh! And I s'pose the mutt that done it got away with a whole hide," growled Tim.

"No. He was the first man killed."

"Yeah? Good!"

"Good indeed, comrade. If only the Huambisas had stopped with killing him—but that is not their way. Nor is it the way of Moyobambinos to let any other men get money if they also can smell it. What that Acosta did, this Maldonado would do if he suspected where we go and why. He would try to betray us in some way, if only to keep us from finding a treasure he could not have. *Capitan*, if the misbegotten cur seeks to know our business, let me handle him."

McKay's set lips twitched slightly.

"He's your meat," he agreed. "I'll handle the trade, though. Tim, stick here on guard."

"Right, cap." The red-haired man swung his left hand carelessly to his gun-barrel in rifle salute. "Whistle to yer dog, Hozy. He's gittin' restless."

José, glancing back at the forgotten Indian whom he had downed, chuckled harshly as he found the man still on the ground. He gave a sharp whistle and lifted a finger. The Indian lurched to his feet and slunk away toward the farther end of his master's boat.

Up the slope clambered the four, each carrying his rifle. Tim got back on board and leaned against the cabin, where he could watch everything without effort. The crew lounged at ease, incurious, unaware that their voyage down the river was likely to end here. The two men of the Moyobambino effaced themselves by entering their own craft and squatting in the bow.

AT THE top of the bank the Northerners threw one glance around the weedy, slovenly little village, wrinkled their noses at the odor of decaying offal, and headed for a damp-looking mud-walled house around which clustered a knot of sluggish men and frowsy women—Indians and mestizos. A boy, spying the approach of the newcomers, let out a shrill yell. The adults turned with a suddenness that sent a small cloud of flies buzzing up off their unclean skins.

"*Estranjeros!*" shrieked a number of the women.

Then, perceiving that those strangers were white *señores*, they began simpering with affected shyness and furtively attempted to pat their hair into something approaching tidiness. The men simply stood and gaped.

With the aggressive stride of the dominant race, the four tramped straight up to the mongrel pack before speaking. The townspeople, scanning the bleak face of McKay and meeting the hard eye of José, involuntarily shrank together, presenting a compact front.

"*Buenos dias, amigos,*" spoke McKay. "Where is your head man?"

"Within, *señor*," answered a fat, pompous-looking mestizo. "The Señor Pablo Arredondo. But he is engaged in affairs of business."

"So. We bring him further affairs. Have the goodness to step aside."

"But the Señor Torribio Maldonado—" began the important one.

*True. Recorded in the official report of Lieut. William Lewis Herndon, U. S. N., to the 33rd Congress, on his exploration of the Valley of the Amazon, made under the direction of the Navy Department, eight years after the massacre.

"Can step aside also," McKay broke in. "We have haste."

"And we dislike the stench of your fly-blown town too much to wait," José added with a hard grin.

The fat yellow man swelled as if mortally insulted. Then, catching the glimmer under the black brows of the outlaw, he suddenly began laughing in a scared way and backed a step.

"Enter, *amigos!*" he squeaked. "Ha, ha, ha! A rich joke, *á fé mia!* He, he, he!"

With a contemptuous glance José forthwith began shouldering his arrogant way through to the door. The three Northerners with less violence but no less firmness, pressed the townsmen aside and forced a path which otherwise might not have opened to them for an hour. A moment later they were inside the musty house.

The "affairs of business" were in plain sight on a rickety table. They comprised the contents of a large bottle, which the Señor Torribio Maldonado and the civic authority evidently had already discussed to some extent; for the bottle was far from full, while the head man showed signs of being on the way to becoming so. His greasy face was heavy with liquor and displeasure at being disturbed. One direct look at him told the newcomers that trading might be a protracted affair, involving much patience and diplomacy—unless a shrewd stroke could be delivered at the outset. McKay instantly decided on the nature of that stroke.

But first he and his companions studied the other man, whose predatory face hung over the table like that of a vulture. Hook-beaked, slit-mouthed, beady-eyed, scrawny of neck and humpy of shoulder, with one skinny hand lying like a curved talon on the table—there was no need to ask if he was a Moyobambino. Already his cunning eyes were agleam with speculation as to whether he could make anything out of these travelers.

McKay turned his gaze back to the frowning visage of the big man of the village. Without speaking, he casually drew from a pocket a gold coin and flipped it whirling into the air. In a shaft of sunlight shining in at a small side window the spinning gold flashed yellow darts at the two men beyond the table. Into the sodden face of Arredondo leaped an answering flash of life.

Gold! Gold money! Here where money was so scarce that canoemen were paid with stingy yards of cloth and business was done by primitive barters, where a paltry *peseta* was something to be proudly exhibited and a silver *sol* was to be hoarded—gold money, tossed carelessly into the air! The glittering rise and fall of that coin accomplished more than half an hour of patient talk would have done. Hardly had it thudded softly back into McKay's palm when the greasy one was leaning forward, his loose lips writhing in an ingratiating grimace. The Moyobambino—his hand had clenched like the claw of a swooping hawk.

"*Señores!*" gurgled the town authority. "What is your pleasure?"

"Canoes," laconically answered the captain, closing his hand but allowing the rim of the yellow disk to peep out between his fingers. "Two three-man canoes. For them we will trade a fine large *garretea.*"

"A *garretea!*" The other face fell. "What should we of San Regis do with so big a boat? And two canoes of that sort—*no hay.*"

"There is one in the port," disputed McKay. "Think hard, my friend. There must be another."

"*No hay,*" was the doleful answer.

Then the Señor Torribio Maldonado intruded himself.

"*Amigo mio—querido amigo mio—*" he began.

"Liar!" spat José. "No man is your 'dear friend.' No man wishes to be. Hold your tongue!"

The man of Moyobamba, after one look, obeyed. Meanwhile McKay took another tack.

"Then we must keep our *garretea.* Also we keep our gold. If there were canoes—but there are none. Good day."

Dropping the coin back into a pocket, he turned doorward.

"Wait!" blurted the pride of San Regis. "If there were canoes, you would buy them—with gold?"

"Yes. But—*no hay.*"

McKay took a step outward.

"*Señor!* Have the goodness to wait—one little moment. One canoe there is, *si.* And——"

"That canoe is mine, Pablo!" yelled Maldonado. "Before these strangers came you agreed to let me have it, and also to give me a new crew for my big boat——"

"—And now it comes to my mind that

there is another," pursued the greasy one, ignoring the trader. "I had forgotten—it is just finished—it will be put into the water immediately, *caballero mio!* Mariano—Juan—Mauricio—you others! Put beside the *garretea* of these gentlemen the new canoe! At once!"

"But it is mine—they are mine!" screeched the Moyobambino. "I will sell them to you, *señores*——"

"You have not paid for them," Arredondo harshly retorted. "So they are not yours. *Señor— Capitan*—that is real gold in your hand? You will give it me now? How much?"

"Twenty gold dollars of the United States of North America," McKay solemnly answered, opening his hand half-way. "Gold. Gold of the finest. You shall have it when we have the canoes."

"*Santo Domingo! San Pedro! Madre de Dios!* The canoes are mine!" roared Maldonado. "He has no right to sell them! Give the gold to me!"

José burst into a roar of mirth. The others grinned.

"Oho-ho-ho!" yelped the outlaw. "A Moyobambino beaten in a trade! Twenty golden dollars, Torribio, which go not into your claws! Yah-hah-ha! It is too good!"

The trader, beside himself, sprang up, knocking over the flimsy table. Like a flash José's face froze.

"Sit, *señor!*" he said softly, a sinister sibilance in his tone.

For one instant the other glared—for one instant only. Then, his face that of a man who had just looked Death in the eye, he slowly, very carefully, sank back. He still sat there when the adventurers and the greedy-mouthed Arredondo had passed outside.

But a little later, when the two new canoes were hitched to the *garretea* and all San Regis stood clustered on the bank, the man of Moyobamba appeared and bent a long look on the gold-piece now reposing in the dirty palm of the double-dealing Pablo, who gloated down at its yellow luster as if hypnotized. Then his sly gaze lifted to Pablo's fascinated face, and he grinned a cunning grin.

To the white men out on the water, already outward bound, he yelled boldly—

"Where do you go with all those boats?"

Rand, lounging against the cabin, spoke his first words since leaving the Tigre Yacu.

"To the devil!" he snapped.

"A quick voyage to you!" came the jeering answer.

"Faith," muttered Tim Ryan, "mebbe ye spoke a true word, feller, at that."

CHAPTER V

EYES IN THE BUSH

GRIPPED again by the current of the Marañon, the long river-boat and its half-squad of canoes floated downstream. It traveled slowly, however, for McKay had ordered the paddlers to rest. Meanwhile a council of war proceeded in the cabin.

"We have to get rid of this *garretea*, its crew, and the *montaria*," stated McKay. "May as well drift until we figure out how. It won't take us long to go back upstream, and it's as well to get away from San Regis and that snooping trader. Now what'll we do with this cumbersome craft?"

Frowns of thought ensued. The big boat had become a veritable elephant on their hands. It was José who suggested a solution of the problem.

"Perhaps this may do, *capitan*. Send boat and crew to Iquitos, and with them a *carta* to a man I know, telling him to pay off the crew and hold the boats for us. I have a friend there—oh, yes, even an outlaw has friends—who will do this if I write the letter. The two boats are worth much more than the wages for the paddlers, is it not so? Then he will lose nothing if we never come to get them.

"Promise the Indians more pay if they reach there by a certain time, and they will travel fast enough to keep ahead of that spying Maldonado, who surely would question them if he caught up with them. Or does he travel down the river? I wish I knew what is in his *garretea*."

"I can tell ye that," volunteered Tim. "I got tired standin' on board, so I rambled over and peeked at his cargo. It's heavy stuff—copper kittles and hardware and crockery——"

"Ah! *Está bien!* He goes upstream. If he were downbound he would be carrying straw hats, sarsaparilla, sugar, and such things, for the down-river trade. Then we need not care how much time these paddlers take. Only give them the letter, explain to the *popero*, and let them go. Is the plan good, *capitan?*"

"Why not pay 'em off ourselves?" Rand

demurred. "We've got lots of trade-cloth——"

"If you pay them they will go straight back home as soon as we are out of sight, *señor*," José interrupted. "Let us make a good start up the Tigre Yacu before any one learns of our journey. Not that many will dare to follow, but——"

"José has the right idea," clipped McKay. "That looks like a good cove over yonder. May as well transfer our stuff there. *Popera! Adentro!* Inland, over yonder!"

The puzzled steersman obediently swung his rudder and growled at the paddlers. The flotilla veered, plowed into a gap in the bank, bumped to a stop against the shore. At once the work of transshipment began.

The paddlers, much mystified, found themselves stowing in the two newly acquired canoes the sealed kerosene tins—which held not oil but food, cartridges, and such necessities, soldered tight to keep out moisture and thievish hands—and other paraphernalia of their *patrones*. Meanwhile the Peruvian, equipped with paper and pencil by Knowlton, laboriously composed a brief note which he signed, not with name or initials, but with an undecipherable symbol. When it was done he laughed in self-derision.

"Look at the miserable scrawl!" he jeered. "When I was a little boy in—a certain town beyond the mountains—I wrote such a hand that the *padre* used to pat my head. And now—*San Pablo!* one would think this note written with a machete instead of a pencil. Years of the paddle and the gun have destroyed the writing trick. I move the whole arm to make one tiny letter."

"Ain't it the truth?" sympathized Tim. "Me, I never was no hand to write, but till I went to France I could git off some kind of a letter to me girl without tearin' me shirt. Then after I got used to heavin' Fritzies around with me bay'nit I couldn't sling a pen at all, at all. I'd git cramps. So I jest wrote, 'Wait till I git home, kid, and I'll tell ye all about it. So no more from yours truly.' And I let it go at that."

"And what did the girl say, *amigo?*" laughed José.

"Aw, she gimme a long-distance bawlin' out and then married a guy that was makin' a million a week in a shipyard. I got me another girl toot sweet—one o' them pretty li'l frogs—and saved a lot o' wear and tear on me wrist, to say nothin' o' paper and ink. Hey, there, ye wall-eyed Settin' Bull, where ye puttin' that bag? Over there—*por alli—allà*— Aw, talk to him, Hozy! I git me French and Spinach mixed when I want to talk fast."

José, chuckling, set the bewildered Indian right with three sharp words and a gesture, and therefore aided in speeding up the shifting of the equipment. The coppery crew, who knew they would not be kicked or struck by the North Americans, were taking their time in all they did; but when they heard the Spaniard's crackling oaths and found him looming over them in apparent eagerness to decapitate any man who dawdled, they jumped. Under the lash of his tongue they finished the job in half-time.

Then, after a final inspection of the *garretea* to make sure nothing was forgotten, McKay told the crew that their ways parted here. Carefully, patiently, he explained just what they were to do, until it was evident that it was understood. The letter he gave to the *popero*, who took it gingerly and turned it over and over. Then he glanced along the huddle of Indian faces, which stared glumly back at him as if their owners wondered if they were not the victims of some white-man treachery.

"José, you're sure these chaps will be paid in full at Iquitos?" he demanded.

"I am positive, *capitan*," the Peruvian answered earnestly. "I know that man as I know my right hand, and he will do as I have written. He will pay them their just wage and get them places on some upbound boat. They will have no trouble in receiving what is due or in returning home."

The captain nodded. In direct, curt, but kindly phrases he pledged them his word that no trick was being put upon them, and that the paper in the hands of the *popero* would bring them the full reward for their toil. The sooner they reached Iquitos, he pointed out, the sooner they would be paid; they had best not dally on the way, and above all they must not lose the paper or allow any one to turn them aside from their journey. For a moment they stared back at him, searching his face. Then they stirred and muttered their belief in his words.

"We leave with you," McKay added, smiling a little, "to help you on your way, a little *aguardiente*. It is here in the cabin. *Adios.*"

The glum faces lit up. Teeth gleamed in joyous grins, and as the captain went over the side they scrambled into the cabin to drink his parting gift.

"Nothing like sending them away happy," laughed Knowlton, who had suggested the idea of leaving the raw liquor. "Poor fellows, they get little enough pleasure."

And as the three canoes slid out into the river they all looked back and tossed their paddles in response to the shouts of the sons of the western mountains:

"*Hasta luego, señores!* Good-by for awhile!"

They were the last cheery words the five were to hear, except from one another, for many a long day.

INTO the glare of the westering sun surged the canoes, driven by the powerful strokes of fresh muscles and by the impetus of a new quest. The twin dugouts, built for three men each, held two pairs; McKay and Knowlton in the one, Rand and Tim in the other. José, alone in his smaller craft, slipped along with the careless ease of a tireless machine. Before long, he knew, his four new mates would become conscious of hot palms and fatigued shoulders; for weeks of traveling in the confinement of a *garretea* give men scant chance to keep fit. But he said no word.

San Regis drew near, crept past, and fell away behind without sign that the passage of the little fleet had been observed. Evidently the population of the town was again clustered at the door of the great man Arredondo, listening to every word uttered and watching the progress of their Moyobamba visitor's campaign to get possession of the American double-eagle. The adventurers, remembering the cunning gaze of the trader at the gold-dazed Pablo, had not the slightest doubt that before morning the up-river man would have that coin in his greasy pouch. But that was a matter for Pablo to worry about. They had their canoes—stout boats worth double the price paid—and were on their way.

Soon the one-man canoe drew a little ahead and swung inward. It curved athwart the eddying shore-current and glided into the bank, out of sight. The others, following close, slowed beside it and came to a pause. Once more clear water flowed around them. Behind rolled the Marañon. Ahead opened the Tigre.

For a moment, holding their boats steady with slow strokes, the five men gazed around. One last look they took at the tremendous river marching onward in savage power through the wilderness—a grim monster which, even though it now rested between the periods of its engulfing floods, gnawed ceaselessly at its jungle walls and from time to time brought miles of tree-laden shore tumbling down into its insatiable maw; which, already a thousand miles away from its birthplace in little Lake Lauricocha, would sweep on eastward for three thousand miles farther, growing more and more vast, until it hurled its yellow tide two hundred miles out into the Atlantic Ocean—a sullen serpent of waters, malignant, merciless, untamable as the colossal mountains whence it sprang.

Yet the level-eyed voyagers in the hollowed-out log boats gave the monster only the casual look of men who cared no whit for its power. It was the smaller stream that held their searching gaze—the frank, clear water which seemed to hold no evil thing in its limpid depths, yet which lured bold hearts into a dim land of sorcery and there swallowed them utterly or flung them back, scarred, mutilated, and mad; the flowing road to mountains of golden treasure, but a road beleaguered by ferocious beasts and by man-demons who belted themselves with human hair and shrunk human heads into leering dolls.

"Once upon a time," said blue-eyed Knowlton, "when I was a little kid, I used to read fairy tales and Arabian-Nights yarns about caves where dragons would come out and shoot fire out of their noses and broil wayfarers to death; and about ogres who trapped travelers into their castles and stewed them for supper, and one-eyed giants who picked men up by the feet and bit their heads off, and so on. And when I went to bed and the room was dark I could see those thing standing in the black corners and glowering at me. Gee, I used to sweat blood!

"Then when I grew older I sneered at myself for ever believing such things. But lately I'm not so sure I sneered rightly. There isn't much choice, after all, between a fiery dragon and a tiger that tears out your throat, or between a fellow who bites off your head and one who cuts it off and keeps it so that he can spit in your face whenever he feels grouchy."

"Getting cold feet!" smiled McKay, who more than once had seen the former lieutenant plunge recklessly into an inferno of blood and flame among the shell-torn trenches of the Hindenburg Line.

"Uh-huh. Numb from the knees down. But, on the level, I'm beginning to wonder if we're not a lot of jackasses to go in here. Seems as if those San Regis bums would have some gold if this river of theirs was gold-bearing."

José spat.

"Bah! Those sons of sloths? If the ground beneath their miserable hovels were full of gold, *teniente*, they would not have ambition enough to dig it up. And to go up this stream seeking it—not they! They lock themselves into their houses at night for fear of the *tigres*."

Rand nodded.

"Same way over in the Andes," he said. "Indians, poor as dirt, shivering and lousy, living on top of millions in gold and silver and never digging down to it. Takes a white man to hunt treasure. What's biting you, Tim?"

Tim, who had been twitching his shoulders as if to dislodge something, now lifted a hand and scratched.

"Nothin'—yet. Mebbe it's only me imagination, but I been feelin' crawly since we left that there town. Them folks ain't human. I bet the only time they git a bath is when they git caught in the rain. And I seen a whole platoon o' bugs maneuverin' in one guy's hair. And did ye pipe the bare-naked kid eatin' dirt?"

All shook their heads. But José smiled understandingly.

" 'Tis so. He was clawin' up hunks o' clay and chewin' 'em—I seen him swaller the stuff! And them bugs—ooch!"

He scratched again vigorously.

"That is nothing new, comrade," José said calmly. "Children who are eaters of dirt are common enough in this country west of the Napo, and east of it too. But unless we are to go back to San Regis, let us move now and find a place to make camp tonight. The sun swings low."

"Right ye are. Le's go. I'll fight all the head-hunters this side o' Heligoland before I'll go back among them bugologists."

The water swirled behind the paddles and creamed away from the prows. Three abreast, the canoes surged away up the river of Tigers. They passed the spot where the dead ashes of the Peruvian's noonday fire lay hidden in the grass, and where the mud still held the broad tracks of a cat-creature which long before this had been torn asunder by down-river alligators. On they swept, gradually growing smaller, until at length they slid out of sight around a turn.

Then, at the edge of the thick growth above the point where they had paused, a man moved. Across his flat coppery face, expressionless as that of a crude wooden idol, passed a flicker of hatred. One dirty paw, resting on the hilt of a machete dangling down his ragged breeches, tightened as if around the throat of a Spaniard. Beady eyes glancing warily around him, he began silently working his way eastward, down the bank of the Marañon.

He was the Indian whom José had knocked flat on the shore of the port of San Regis. And he was on his way back to the town where waited his master, the Señor Torribio Maldonado.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE PATH OF THE STORM

BETWEEN two hundred-foot walls of vivid verdure, starred softly by delicately tinted orchids and tipped by the yellowish bud-flowers of palms, the Tigre Yacu shone like polished silver, unruffled by the faintest breath of air. On its placid bosom were mirrored great flowering ferns, fifty feet tall; curving stems and drooping fronds of the giant of grasses, the bamboo; the high-reaching branches of the *jagua*, the enormous plumes of the *jupati*, the feather-bunch crown of the *ubussu*, the white trunk and flat top of the lordly silk-cotton tree, and the looping, twining, dangling network of aerial vines.

Even the emerald gleam of the huge green tree-beetles, shining like jewels in the glare of the westering sun, was reflected from the flawless surface of the river of the evil name. Over it wheeled and floated clouds of gorgeous blue and yellow butterflies. Across it winged flocks of green parrots, and along it hopped and yelped huge-beaked toucans gaudy in feather-dress of flaring yellow, orange, and red.

A captivating, alluring river it seemed, beckoning the wanderer on into an elysium where no evil could wait and where stingless

bees would pour their honey into his bowl.

But to those wanderers who even now were stroking up into its luxuriance and furrowing its smooth surface into uneasy ripples it was not the Eden it looked. Every man of the five was tormented by scores of red-hot needles.

Though their distance from shore might protect them from savage man or beast, it only made them easier prey to the tiny torturers whose ferocity has for centuries aided the head-hunting barbarians to keep the tributaries of the Marañon almost uninhabited by white men; the bloodthirsty mosquitoes and *sancudos*, the almost invisible *piums*, the big black *montuca* flies whose lancets bore so big a hole in the flesh that blood drips long after the bite. Out on the broad Marañon itself, where the east winds swept strong and steady across all floating craft, the North Americans had suffered little from such pests. But now, well up the Tigre River, they had long lost that wind; and the exposed skin of every man was blackened with the minute scars of the *piums* and scabbed with the wounds of the *montucas*. And, with merciless persistence, fresh hordes kept swarming to the attack.

Yet, in days of dogged journeying, they had suffered nothing except this constant blood-letting. Not once had human foes appeared. Not once had any animal or snake assailed them—though each night the roar of more than one *tigre* had sounded too close to camp for comfortable rest, and from time to time during the day as well there came from the maze of shore growth the menacing note of some jungle king voicing his resentment of the invasion of his domain. They received no response to their challenge, those fierce animals, for Captain McKay had issued strict orders to ignore them.

"Let them alone unless they attack," he commanded. "We're here for something more important than cat-shooting, and the less noise we make the better. No firing unless necessary."

So, except for the volley which had blown the head off the big black cat at the Marañon, neither the high-powered bolt-action rifles of the Americans nor the big-bored repeater of José had spoken since the five-cornered partnership had been formed. Hunting was done at the end of each day's traverse, but only with a light .22 table-gun, which made little more noise than a breaking stick, and with bow and arrow, which killed in silence.

The archer of the company was the taciturn, green-eyed Rand. If, up to the time of the arrival at the mouth of the Tigre, he had been merely a very silent partner whose financial interest and ability to rough it formed his main excuse for being one of the party, he now became one of its most important members.

For five years, before being found and rehabilitated by the three former soldiers who now were his comrades, he had been a wild creature of the jungle; and grim necessity had made him as expert in the construction and use of bow and arrows as any of the savages among whom he lived. More, it had given him the keen hunting instinct and the instantaneous perception of the presence of animal life to which no civilized white man can attain without living long amid primeval surroundings. And now, though no longer a "wild dog," he had not lost either his hunting-animal sensitiveness or his deadly skill with the weapon of primitive man.

In fact, his marksmanship with the bow was much better than with the rifle. Though he had equipped himself in the States with the same type of rifle and pistol favored by the ex-Army men, and had made himself thoroughly familiar with their use, he still was only a fair shot. In comparison with the shooting of his companions, his was not even fair. To both McKay and Knowlton belonged the little silver medal with crossed rifles which the United States Army bestows only on its crack shots; Tim, ex-sergeant, had won the sharpshooter's cross—and, in his open-handed way, given it to the girl who later married the shipyard worker; José, veteran jungle-ranger, was deadly with either rifle or machete. In such company Rand was low gun.

Whether because of a natural dislike to feeling himself inferior to his comrades in the use of weapons, or because of an atavistic urge to revert to the barbaric implement of death after returning to the primordial land east of the Andes, on his way down the big river he had quietly built for himself a new bow, with a quiver and a goodly supply of arrows. A formidable weapon was that bow.

Made after the fashion of the Javary cannibal country where he had lived, it was fully seven feet long, built for shooting

high into the air and transfixing prey seen on the loftiest branches, or for dropping the arrow in a parabolic plunge on quarry—animal or human—found on the ground.

The quiver, woven in basket style from tough palm-strips, he decorated at the top with a thin wooden collar carved with a sharp knife from a section of *palo de sangre*. And the arrows, made from straight cane, he tipped according to the savage custom with barbed tail-bones of the swamp sting-ray, bought from Indians.

Equipped with these and minus his boots—which, despite the ever-present danger of snake-bite, he refused to wear while hunting—he would slip away into the bush late in the day, silent and deadly as any prowling beast of the forest. With him, carrying the little .22, went—not José, the other bush-trained hunter of the party, but Knowlton. While they were out José and the other two would make camp for the night. And before the sun slid down behind the distant Andes and night whelmed the forest the absent pair always returned with ample meat.

José, who under normal conditions should have been one of the hunters, remained at the river-bank from choice; the choice being due to the fact that he was not allowed to shoot his own heavy gun. On trying to snap the light, short, low-power rifle to his shoulder and catch the sights quickly he found himself, as he expressed it, "all thumbs." After a few vain efforts to accustom himself to it he handed it back with a rueful grin.

"With a man's gun, *amigos*, with that old iron bar of mine, I can shoot," he said. "But with this toy rifle—this little boy's plaything—no. And these tiny bullets—*por Dios*, they feel like fleas in my hand! If I shot a monkey with one of them I should feel that I had insulted him."

So it was Knowlton—who had amused himself many a time by popping the little gun at alligators' eyes during the long days of drifting—who followed Rand on the stealthy pot-hunting trips. Despite his comparative inexperience at jungle travel afoot, he could step quietly and spy game quickly, and he could shoot like a flash. With Rand as his guide he had no difficulty in getting about, and now and then he knocked over some bird or small animal in places where his partner's long bow was at a disadvantage. Thus the pair formed a very efficient team.

NOW another day was nearing its end. A sweltering day, it had been; a breathless, cloudless day on which the vindictive assaults of the insect hordes seemed to have been redoubled. Ceaselessly they hunted skin-spots not already hardened and scabbed by the bites of their predecessors; they burrowed into beards and shaggy hair, they crawled into noses and ears, they sneaked inside shirts and strove to dig under the sweatbands of the hats.

The paddlers, smeared with clay which they had applied in the vain hope of defending their tortured skins, grinned and bore it; grinned not with mirth or contempt, but with the fixed facial contraction of acute discomfort which must be endured. Tight-mouthed, slit-eyed, their faces were masks of unbreakable determination. Their shoulders swung with regular unbroken sway, and the paddles rose and fell as if moved by machines driven by inexorable will. Bugs might come and bugs might go, but it seemed that the three boats would surge on with never a halt to the journey's end.

But the eyes under those slits were scanning the shores, which now were closer together than back at the Marañon, and from time to time the heads turned in a brief look at some possible camp-site. It was nearing the hour when the voyagers must land, hunt, throw up pole-and-palm shelters, sling hammocks, eat, and seek badly needed refuge from their tormentors inside the drab insect-bars. And in his stubborn heart every man was glad of it.

With a wordless grunt José veered out of line toward the left shore. The twin dugouts followed. Into a shadowy creek between small bluffs they went. Within the entrance thick brush flanked them like impenetrable walls. But a few rods farther upstream José drew up to shore and paused. There the tangle was thinner, and the Peruvian pointed to an arm-thick *sindicaspi* tree.

"Will do," granted McKay, speaking through lips swollen by bites.

The pair of San Regis dugouts drew up, and their paddlers rose stiffly and stepped ashore.

A moment of wary looking around—then José slashed his machete with whirling

deftness through the nearest bush-stalks, clearing a small space. The travelers pulled from their canoes dry clothing and large gourds, and, with such speed as their tired muscles allowed, they stripped. Insects swooped exultantly at the bared skins. But the pests had hardly alighted when they were swept away by the gourdfuls of water with which their victims deluged themselves from hair to heels. A copious drenching, a swift rub-down, a hurried donning of dry garments, and the five stood reinvigorated. With one accord they produced tobacco and papers and rolled cigarets.

"Got firewood, anyways," remarked Tim, eying the *sindicaspi* tree and luxuriously blowing smoke into the cloud of bugs around him. "Better git busy and make camp. Bet ye we have another crackin' thunderstorm soon. We didn't git no shower today. Same way our first day up — there wasn't no rain that noon, but we sure caught it that night."

The others nodded. The regular noon rain, usually arriving from the east as punctually as if turned on by prearranged schedule, had failed to arrive that day. The air now was oppressively heavy, though nowhere near so hot as out on the river; in fact, the change in temperature was so marked in the damp forest shadows that if the travelers had not shed their sweat-soaked clothing promptly on landing they would have speedily become chilled.

"The rain must come," José agreed. "The path of the sun is the path of the storm, as the Indians say. The sun has nearly passed, and the storm is not far behind."

With which he drew his machete again and renewed his destruction of the small growth. Tim pulled a half-ax from his canoe and advanced on the *sindicaspi* tree—one of the few dependable fuel woods in the humid forests of the upper Amazon. McKay, with a similar ax, looked about for material for the corner-posts and ridge-pole of the night refuge. Rand, who had remained unshod after his bath, got out his big bow, and Knowlton picked up the scorned but useful little rifle. Every man was at his job.

With no word of parting, the pair of hunters slipped away into the woods, working up-stream. Oddly mated they seemed, and incongruously armed: The one stolid-faced as an Indian, black-bearded, hatless, barefoot, carrying the most archaic missile-throwing weapon known; the other light of eye and hair, sensitive-mouthed, appearing more like a dreamer than a man of action, bearing a puny weapon which indeed looked to be the boy's toy José had called it. Yet they were brothers at heart—brothers of the long trails and the lawless lands—and each was equipped to fight the most ferocious beast or man; for strapped to each right thigh swung a heavy automatic, and down each left leg hung a keen machete.

For a short distance they stole along in file, eyes searching the branches, feet subconsciously picking clear going. All at once Rand stiffened and paused; but only for a moment. Then he moved on. Up from the creek-side rose a brown bird resembling a pheasant, which whirred away aloft and vanished among the dense foliage. Knowlton's rifle, instinctively lifted, sank again. Both men had recognized the gamy-looking flier as a *chansu*, whose flesh is so musky that even Indians refuse to eat it.

Onward they crept, threading the pathless tangle like somber shadows for perhaps another hundred yards. Then the light increased. Just ahead the tree-tops thinned, and after a few more stealthy steps the hunters halted behind trees at the edge of a small lagoon. At once each threw up his weapon. A few beet beyond, at the edge of the water, were feeding a splendid pair of *huananas*—big ducks, armed with small horns on the wings.

So close was the prey that Rand, extending his bow horizontally, loosed point-blank. At the low twang of the cord both birds jumped and shot out broad wings in the first beat of flight. But neither rose. With the thrum of the bow blended the snap of the little rifle. The extended wings fell asprawl, the reaching necks collapsed, and both birds floated dead on the water.

Exultantly the men started forward to retrieve their game. In that same moment two things happened. A couple of rods farther on, a bush swayed. As Rand's quick eye caught the movement, the light suddenly dimmed and behind them sounded a rising roar like the onrush of a mighty tidal wave.

For an instant Rand watched the bush. Then, deciding that the movement was caused by some animal, he glanced up. Overhead loomed black clouds, hurtling

westward at terrific speed. Behind, the roar of the onsweeping wind culminated in a crash of thunder. Storm was upon them.

Dropping his rifle, Knowlton plunged thigh-deep into the muddy pool and seized the birds. Rand swept a searching gaze along the shore, seeking shelter—and found it. Just beyond the spot where the bush had wagged stood a patriarchal old tree, in whose base opened a black hole. Shouting, the green-eyed man pointed to it, grabbed up the rifle, and ran. Knowlton, floundering ashore with a duck dangling by the neck from each fist, raced in his wake.

Another crash—a searing flash of lightning—a smashing deluge of rain—then Rand reached the hollow tree and plunged into it. In the same instant Knowlton heard a startled yell and glimpsed something darting out of the hole; a thing that seemed only a thin, vanishing streak, elbow-high from the ground. In mid-stride he dropped both ducks and snatched his pistol from the holster. Then he hurled himself into the dim tree-trunk.

Struggling bodies plunged against him and spun him outside again. A sheet of rain lashed into his face, blinding and choking him. Lightning flared anew, casting a ghastly greenish glare through the sudden darkness. By its weird flicker he saw the fighting men reel about in the blur of falling water, then pitch headlong back into the hole.

Into that hole he leaped again. The light of storm winked out. Dimly he made out a man-tangle at his feet. As he strove to see which was his partner they heaved over violently, knocking his legs from under him. His pistol flew from his hand. Falling, he grabbed fiercely at the man on top.

Then, before he knew whom he had seized, above them sounded a straining, creaking groan of wood. The ground rose under them. A rending crack—a rushing sound—a tremendous blow. Then blackness and silence.

CHAPTER VII

THE CLAWS OF THE TIGRE

NIGHT engulfed the jungle in such blackness as only the jungle knows.

The vast sea of tree and bush and vine, by day almost impenetrable but nevertheless composed of myriads of separate parts, now was a solid bulk. Far above it the tropic stars shone in a clear sky of deep dark blue, dropping a faint light which, to such creatures as moved above the matted roof of branch and leaf, gave form and substance to those things near at hand. But down below, where shadows lay thick even at noonday, the gloom now was that of an abyss. Through it could pass only such life as could dilate its eyes to the rims, the noisome things which have no eyes and need none, or that unbeatable creature—man—who can carry light with him.

Yet, among those Stygian shades, life moved. Misshapen ant-bears stalked slowly about, their gluey tongues drooling out, in search of ant-hills. Giant cats, hungry and savage, hunted in ugly impatience. And down beside a little pool on a creek of the Tigre Yacu, a man struggled dizzily to sit up.

His first conscious impression was that a *tigre* had snarled. He could not see that beast, but some primitive instinct, inherited perhaps from ape-like ancestors on whom the terrible saber-toothed tiger had preyed ages ago, told him it was only a few feet away, to his right. Moved by the primordial impulse associated with that ancient instinct, he reached above him for a branch to seize as his first move toward safety in the upper air. His hand hit solid wood. At the same instant the invisible brute snarled again.

His head whirled, and he slumped down. For a moment he lay supine, trying to think. He had been fighting—storm had flashed and crashed—something had struck him——

Abruptly the menace of the present knocked all thought of the past from his struggling brain. Hot, fetid breath poured against his bare right leg. A sniffing sound came to his ears. He yanked the leg back, and just in time; for great claws hooked into his breeches, scraping the skin.

Heaving himself over, he felt the cloth give and heard it rip. Then he caught the malevolent gleam of a big eye.

Tardily, something told him he was armed. His right hand slid to his thigh, yanked a flat pistol from a holster—and at that instant the huge paw reached for him again.

The claws sank with a cruel grip into his flesh. Again glimmered the eye. He shoved his weapon forward and fired.

Crash-crash-crash-crash! Four shots shattered the night.

The claws bit deeper in a convulsive spasm. Squirming with pain, he struck at them with his pistol. The barrel hit something hard, unyielding, and the weapon was nearly knocked from his grip. With an inarticulate growl he dropped it and attacked the clutching paw with both hands.

Though it clung to its hold, that paw now was motionless. In a wrenching struggle he tore its hooks loose and threw it aside. Then he scratched around him in a mad effort to recover his gun. One hand hit it and closed around it. At once he lurched up.

A cruel blow on the head downed him. He struck on something softer than earth, slid down it a little, dropped a hand on it. His dazed brain told him it was flesh, warm human flesh.

Another snarl beyond him! Then a hoarse, harsh roar of rage. Would that *tigre* never die? It sounded more malignant, more powerful than ever. Pistol shoved forward, hair bristling, he settled forward on his knees and awaited attack. He could not see the thing; he must hold his fire until——

"It was here, *amigos*. I can not have it wrong— Hah! What is that? *Carcoljoles!* The *tigre* himself!"

The voice struck across the black void with startling suddenness. With it came light. With both voice and light came a louder snarl from the unseen beast.

"Yeah. Let the ruddy mutt have it!"

Rifle reports split the air before the second voice ceased; sharp cracks merging with a blunter shock of exploding gunpowder; two high-velocity guns and an old-fashioned .44 pouring out a ragged volley. Silence followed.

After a tense pause the first voice spoke.

"Dead, I think. But it is best to be sure."

The black powder smashed out for a second time. Another pause.

"*Si.* Dead, comrades. And now if we can find the one whose gun we heard— *Señores!* Knowlton! Rand!"

"Hey, Dave! Looey! For the love o' Mike make a noise!"

The crouching man, who still could not see his rescuers, shouted hoarsely.

"Here! Come closer! This is Dave!"

Sounds of movement began. The light increased. Rand, peering about, found himself walled in. The light shone at a jagged hole beyond him, a scant foot wide.

"Gee, I dunno yet where he's at," came Tim's puzzled tones. "Sounded right yonder— Huh! Lookit the tree down! He must be under that. Hey, Dave, old feller! Are ye all right? Where's looey? That ruddy tiger didn't git him, did he? Gosh, lookit this—another tiger! Under the tree here, dead as a herrin'!"

The torch-light shone brightly now beyond the hole. Rand spoke again.

"In here, fellows. Penned up in a little coop. Can't stand up or get out. Merry must be here too—I'm sort of woozy yet. Got knocked cold awhile ago. Pass in a light."

"Bet yer life, ol'-timer! We'll git ye loose in no time. Jest a minute, till we yank this cat out o' here."

Another hole opened, lower down, as the dead paw was pulled out from the opening through which it had reached the imprisoned man. Then into the upper hole came a torch and a fist.

"Here y'are, Davey. Ye ain't busted up, are ye? Good! Then lookit looey, if he's there with ye. How's he?"

Rand snatched the torch, turned on his knees, and looked down. Just beyond him lay the former lieutenant. His blond hair was blond no more, but a dull red. From under him protruded the naked legs and lower trunk of another man whose head and shoulders seemed to be hidden beyond Knowlton's body. Both were motionless.

Starting up to lift his comrade, Rand struck his head once more against the solid obstacle above. The blow dropped him back to his knees. Pressing one hand to his sore scalp, he took his first look about his prison, seeking a way out.

He had spoken more truly than he knew when, he said he was penned in a coop. Around him rose the encompassing shell of the big old tree, now uprooted and thrown back prone. Over him was the broken butt, and beyond him were great fang-splinters, driven into the torn earth. The tree strained too far by the storm-wind, had broken across its hollow base, collapsed on itself, ripped its own stump loose and shoved it back, then folded and closed like the broken halves of an enormous oyster-shell. Within the cavity the three men were imprisoned.

All this he saw in one slow sweep of the eyes. Then he hunched forward and pulled at Knowlton, who seemed wedged among

gigantic slivers. He could not move him. But he could, and did, determine that he was alive and, though senseless and bleeding from a split scalp, not fatally hurt.

THE smoke of the torch choked him. Hastily he pivoted about and pushed it out through the hole.

"Merry's pinned down," he told the anxious men outside. "Got a cut head, and knocked out, but seems all right otherwise. Got an ax or something? Maybe I can cut him loose."

"Got both axes," Tim informed him, shoving one through. "We been lookin' all over the lot for ye, and we come prepared for anything. Here's the li'l electric flash, too. Slide the switch away over and she'll burn steady. We'll cut this hole bigger while ye git looey clear. How'd ye ever git in this trap anyways?"

Rand wasted no time in explanation just then. Wedging the electric torch in a crack, he commenced the difficult task of cutting Knowlton free. So scant was his head-room that he had to hold the short-handled ax by the back of the blade and make mere pecks at the long wood-fangs. But the edge was keen, and after steady, careful work he managed to liberate his companion.

By that time the hole behind had been enlarged enough to give easy ingress or exit. As he passed back the ax McKay ordered him to come out. But he turned back to Knowlton. Forthwith iron hands gripped his feet, and he was hauled backward out into the air.

"I said to come out," clipped McKay. "You're done up. I'll get Merry."

And, shoving aside both Tim and José, the captain crawled into the cavity. Rand, feeling suddenly weak, sprawled where he had been left.

"Humph! Who's this fellow?" came McKay's muffled voice from the hole.

Rand made no answer, and the captain did not spend time in examining the man he had found under Knowlton. He emerged feet first, dragging the limp form of the lieutenant.

"Glory be!" blurted Tim after a close look and a hurried examination. "He's all here. Scratched up some and leakin' on top, but only asleep. Attaboy, Hozy! Dump it on his head."

José, who had brought a hatful of water, dumped it as requested. McKay, after a searching glance, nodded and turned back to the hole. Rand rolled over, crept on hands and knees to Knowlton's side, and saw the blue eyes flicker open and stare upward. Tim reached to his hip, produced a flask, uncorked it and held it to the blond-bearded mouth. The lieutenant promptly swallowed a mouthful of *anisado*, coughed, grinned, and struggled up.

"Not so fast, looey," chuckled Tim. "Ye're showin' too much speed for yer own good—I was goin' to feed ye another shot o' booze. If ye want it, take it quick or ye won't git it."

"Not now," mumbled the blond man. "Gee, my head aches! Hello, Dave. What's all the row?"

"Row's all over, Merry. Cap is bringing out the chap we found in the tree. Tree busted and fell on us while we were waltzing around in there. Guess the other fellow got busted too."

"He did," McKay's voice corroborated. "Who was he?"

Tim and Jose, who until now had known nothing of another prisoner of the tree, voiced their amazement as they saw what the captain had hauled forth. Rand and Knowlton, too, got to their feet and stared downward. In the wavering torch-light the five men stood in silent contemplation of the sixth.

He was a muscular man of medium stature, black-haired, strong-faced, light-skinned, naked except for a loin-clout of dark-red cloth and a necklace of tiger-claws—a man whose solid frame indicated a strength that would make him an ugly antagonist in hand-to-hand combat. But he never would fight again. His head lay slanting to one side, and his throat was torn wide open.

"Big splinter killed him," vouchsafed McKay. "It's in the tree there. I had to pull him off it."

"Find his bow there too?" queried Rand.

"Didn't notice it. Found a couple of arrows, though, and the little twenty-two gun. Found a side-arm too. Yours, Merry?"

He extended a service pistol. Knowlton, after touching his fingers to his empty holster, took it with a nod of thanks.

"Well, the bow must be there, unless it got knocked outside," Rand asserted. "He was there when I dived in out of the storm. Knew we were coming, too, and didn't care

for our company. Had his arrow drawn, and let go as soon as I popped in. Guess he shot a shade too soon—arrow zipped past my chest and missed. I jumped him. Merry pranced in and fell all over us. Then the world came to an end."

The others nodded. José sank on one knee and studied the dead man.

"An Indian, *amigos*, though light of skin," was his judgment. "A Jivero, perhaps; but I think he is a Yámeo—one of the white Indians. This is Yámeo country. A lone hunter. But his people can not be far off."

Heads lifted and eyes searched the gloom. To all except Knowlton, who had been unconscious at the time, came realization that the rule against loud gunfire had been shattered, and that those reports might have reached hostile ears. But there was little chance that any searching party would seek the gunmen before dawn, and dawn was fully eight hours off.

"We can stow him away out of sight," said McKay, jerking his head toward the tree. "But first, what about that leg of yours, Dave? Looks bad. Jam it?"

"No. Cat tried to haul me out where he could get at me." And Rand briefly related his experiences in the tree.

"Holy jumpin' Jehoshaphat!" rumbled Tim. "Ye sure had a reg'lar time of it, feller! Luck's with ye, I'll say. Ye had about one chance in a million o' livin' through that tree-smash, and if ye hadn't woke up when ye did and had yer gat handy—oof! Better wash yer leg right now, before ye git blood-poison."

"Right," McKay seconded. "Both of you fellows clean up before we start back to camp. José, help Dave. Tim, give Merry a head-wash. I'll attend to this chap."

Stooping, he gripped the dead man and dragged him back to the tree. There he shoved him into the cavity where he had died. Glancing around, he saw the dead *tigre* which had attacked Rand. With a grim smile he lifted it and laid it against the opening.

"Hm. Female," he muttered. "Leave it to the female to claw a man when he's out of luck."

Turning, he stepped aside a few feet and found the other brute, a powerful male. This also he carried to the hole and dropped beside its mate. Picking up Knowlton's little rifle and Rand's quiver of arrows—the bow was broken and useless—he returned to the water, finding the two hunters bathed and being temporarily bandaged with handkerchiefs.

"Did you babes in the woods get any game to pay us for our work?" he demanded.

"Couple of *huananas*. Beauties, too," Knowlton replied. "Ought to be right over back of you somewhere. I dropped them."

"And the cats ate them," José added. "I saw feathers scattered around in the bush there."

"A swell pair o' hunters ye are," chaffed Tim. "Kill a couple o' bananas—I mean *huananners*—and then let the cats git 'em. Next time ye can stay to home and let somebody hunt that can bring in the bacon. Come on, le's git back to camp and open a can or somethin'. We been thrashin' round lookin' for you guys when we'd oughter been eatin'. Hep, hep—left oblique to the guardhouse, march!"

The torches moved. In squad column the little band filed slowly away into the inscrutable gloom. The lights faded out, and the jungle night again brooded over the little spot where the gun-bearing intruders had violated its solitude.

On the black bosom of the placid little lagoon the big stars shone, mirrored upward in a frame of reflected tree-tops. On the trampled shore, where sunlight would reveal them to the first Indian eyes to scan the mud, were the imprints of white men's boots. Those leather-heeled tracks converged at the cavity in the shattered butt of the prone tree. And there, in a crude tomb bearing the fresh marks of white men's axes, a savage son of the jungle who had died fighting white men lay waiting, guarded by two bullet-torn *tigres* of the Tigre Yacu.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Old Hull

by KENNETH HOWELL

Author of "Rum Island," "Wrecker Mallow," etc.

WITH sadness grown harsh, poignant through embittered reflection, Captain Lane faced the gray lengths of days that were, he told himself, the buoys marking the channel into the ultimate harbor. Something of every ship he had commanded had become a part of him; the sea had worn and toughened his body; the spirit of his ships had drenched and filled his heart.

So, now, in the Autumn twilight, the scrubby lawn before the county poorhouse, its flat expanse broken by the benches of inmates, became a marine graveyard, a backwater basin for the dismantling of ships that had wearily for the last time, dropped anchor. And the human driftage on the benches assumed the aspect in John Lane's eyes, of derelicts, the stripped sea-battered hulks, the spiritless wrecks of splendid vessels that had lived, had fought, had lost.

"They lie here, rotting," muttered Captain Lane.

He turned impulsively to the man beside him.

"Don't you want to get out of here? I do."

He saw a light flicker for a moment in the dull eyes of the other, then die. The lips opened and closed without sound. Waste of breath, futility. In mute contempt Captain Lane resumed his brooding contemplation of the quiet reach of meadowland, sloping gently to the sea. It dropped away, a scant half-mile of countryside, easily traversed by road and shorter pathway, and yet an insuperable barrier, for while it was true that one could cross it in a half-hour, come to the water's edge, and even rest on a wooden jetty for a smoke, that was fixedly as far as one might go. Passing ships, coastal and deep-water steamers hull down in the blue distance, called and lured an old shipmaster, but long before supper time he must knock the ashes from his pipe and with back to the sea, retrace his steps to the Home.

The Home! Existence in it, a shadowy fantom of life, thinly dreary; a merciless destroyer of self-respect, the lowest level of hopelessness. Captain Lane drew hard on his after-supper pipe. The few flakes of tobacco at the bottom of the bowl glowed redly, then swiftly died to gray ash.

He rose abruptly, strode into the house and in silence mounted the narrow stairway. In the unshaded glare of his room, his seamed face stood out, harsh, weathered, beneath the heavy thatch of white hair. Gray eyes lost in distances, still gave steadfast battle to the advancing frailty of extreme old age. The trembling hands had succumbed, the thin legs, the wispy throat, but the light in the eyes even now at the ebb tide of courage, never quite went out. For hours this night, he lay sleepless, rigid on the bed.

"If I think on like this, I'll go crazy," he

scolded himself. "Perhaps I am now. —— the sea!"

He turned restlessly on his side, with eyes closed. The cramped confines of the room disappeared; the rasping inspirations of his roommate were hushed; the nondescript sounds of the old rambling house blended into the dreamed creaking of a ship— He was out on the starboard wing of the bridge, in the night, feeling his way anxiously along the dark shadow of an unfamiliar coast. There should be a light, a white sector, and then he could stand in to shore. The waters were troubled from tide-rips close by. They heaved with regularity at the heavy thrust of the ground-swell bearing in toward the invisible shelf of an unseen continent. Keenly he stared across the sea—there must be no error now —within a quarter hour the white sector must flash—it was a link in the chain of his life.

For the flash of this light he had studied navigation in early years; that this light must flash, men for centuries had wandered and studied and died at sea. Its part in his professional existence was fixed, immutable. Any minute now—a low hail from the mate on the flying bridge—then it showed, dim, far off on the starboard quarter—the white sector! And at its diamond gleam, John Lane woke and stared at the familiar bareness of his small room, grayly visible in the growing dawn.

The dream was gone, shattered and riven by reality as webbed tendrils of fog are borne off on the drive of mounting wind. But with the passing of the ship, the sea, the coast, one image retained its strength—the white sector. It seemed to burn still in the mind of Captain Lane—it was real—the brilliant flare of hope—of definite plan —of courage.

It was cold in the room. Shivering he turned over on his side to reach his hand down to the time-softened leathern belt about his waist. He recalled the days when it had been weighty with gold coins, stiff with crisp new currency, a temporary source of supply to meet the demands of short stays in a far-flung route of trading-ports. Now he frowned grimly at the limp empty pockets of the belt. His fingers loosened the clasp of a flap and unerringly found in the dusty interior, a single bill. Five dollars. Five dollars? For long months it had been that—only that. But now, in the anticipated alchemy of his plan it was changed, transmuted to a long rail journey, a scanty meal or two, and then for no matter how short a time—that would depend upon chance—to the inexpressible delight of freedom. A shudder of excitement shook the thin frame beneath the blanket. To cleave once more his own course! To breathe—to breathe——

THE tramp *Shenandoah*, Norfolk to Buenos Aires with general cargo, was off the Virgin Islands when the boatswain, straightening out the paint locker, stumbled over something soft and yielding, that lay crumpled on the wooden grating. With a grumbled oath at the carelessness of his predecessor, he stooped in the still darkness of the compartment. The orange spurt of a match broke the gloom into fragments, settled into a momentarily steady glow that fell upon the wide-opened eyes of an old man staring dazedly up from the deck. The lips moved faintly, a single word forming with palpable effort on their blanched line—

"Water."

When it was brought and an electric lamp fitted into the empty socket on the bulkhead, John Lane looked dully at the little group of men pressing about him. Words curiously muffled—old-timer—stowaway; questioning faces, remote and blurred, seeped into recognition as strange faces and stranger words, without meaning, almost chaotic. Presently he came to full consciousness as the men fell back to make way for a newcomer. He sat up in dizziness and then slumped to his elbow facing the angry lowering countenance of the captain of the ship. He never forgot this first view of Captain Henry, a great hulk of a man with frosty steel-blue eyes that glittered as it seemed then with suppressed venom and rage.

"Stand up!"

The old man got to his knees, then slowly, weakly to his feet, steadying himself against the bulkhead. The tramp rolled easily, steaming through a calm sea on her southern course. It seemed unnaturally still in the deadened air of the paint locker. The hush was undisturbed for a time as Captain Henry obviously struggled to control his wrath. His words when they came were tersely, coldly put.

"Your name, occupation, reason for stowing away?"

"John Lane, sir, a—a messman." The stowaway stammered, swallowed hard at this.

He went on more calmly:

"I—I wanted to get back to sea. I'd been out of a ship, sir; on the beach, for a long time."

Captain Henry's face congested darkly. His hands curled into huge brutally menacing fists, then relaxed convulsively. He spoke sharply to a man who was peering in at the doorway.

"Steward, put this man to work. As for you, Lane, you'll go before the American consul in Buenos Aires. By ——, I'll leave you on the beach!"

He whirled to stride swiftly out on deck.

Ten minutes after John Lane commenced the routine duties in the galley. As he coaled the range, first poking the bed of fire to a glowing mass, his heart seemed to share the flame that licked upward. His ardent thoughts were uncooled by sense of menial service. It was all so glorious, so strong. A man again! At sea—among men—his own kind. Perhaps he had said something of this aloud, for the first cook was laughing good-naturedly at him.

"Take it easy, matey, this ain't no wuk-house. A good ship. The Old Man's crusty but he's soft under."

John Lane grinned wanly and stirred the fire.

IN THE weeks that followed, the stowaway going faithfully about his work, cleaning staterooms, peeling potatoes, serving meals, helping all that he could all the time, found that the cook had spoken with judgment. It was not only a comfortable ship but a pleasant one. The crew quickly made friends with the sprucely clean old sailorman. In a day he was one of them. Later, more deliberately he was liked by the engineer officers, the mates. One day, crossing the equator, the captain gave him a grim nod. His evening hours were spent in solemn contemplation of the sea that was his life. Golden, green, blue, blood-red beneath the fire of the setting sun, he watched it drop away aft into the darkening north. The stars marched in majestic ranks across the purple sky, and the old sea-captain smoked and watched and worshiped. The stars, his stars, the ship, the sighing breath of the sea. Later, some one, perhaps it would be a blackened fireman, sweating, coming off watch at midnight, would push a pillow under the white head of the sleeping man and tuck a blanket about the thin body on the hatch cover.

Pernambuco was raised and left behind, a lonely sentinel on the Brazilian coast and then one clear day the *Shenandoah* steamed into the mouth of the River Plate and on up the wide reach of water to the outer roadstead of Buenos Aires. She entered the harbor slowly through the maze of bridges and narrow canals. The city closed in on the ship, to starboard, to port. The *Shenandoah* was warped into her berth, a marine pygmy, dwarfed in the presence of three great liners, their lofty superstructures glistening with fresh paint, resplendent in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. She was bathed in a flood of crimson light as she drifted, checked by the twisting lines, forward, aft, into her dock.

After supper John Lane watched a little wistfully, the men file forward to the chartroom on the bridge to draw on their pay for spending money ashore. It seemed to bring out so sharply the gulf that set him apart—stowaway—outcast, belonging nowhere. He sighed, going on with his work. An hour later, scalding a copper cauldron, he glanced up to see the third mate, the youngster Reynolds, lounging in the doorway. There was a queer smile on the smooth tanned face.

"The Old Man wants you, doctor."

Methodically attentive to detail, the stowaway rinsed and wiped the deep vessel and then running a hand across his white hair, left the galley. Captain Henry did not lift his head as John Lane stood before him. He was busy writing in an enormous book, its pages ruled in red lines, marred with the scrawled signatures of the ship's company. Captain Henry was speaking. The chartroom seemed to sway before the eyes of the man who had stowed away. He could not, he told himself, have heard correctly. There must be a mistake. Then came the caustic repetition.

"How much money do you want to draw, Lane?"

"Money, sir, money?" he stammered.

The captain cleared his throat irritably.

"You're not going before the consul on charges. Instead, he'll arrange to sign you on as third cook. I'll let you draw

now, up to ten dollars. Come, speak up, man!"

But John Lane could not force an answer beyond his lips. What he wished to say, deeply, hotly, he knew could not be said. Out of the fog of his emotion he managed at last—

"I'll draw ten dollars, captain, and—and thank you."

He made an uneven signature. The ink ran into a blot.

"Go on. Get ashore," said Captain Henry, "and don't get drunk. You are too old. I'll have trouble enough getting the rest of the men out of jails and hospitals."

A STRENGTHENED realization of his victory over adverse circumstances swept through John Lane, reaching the inmost fibers of his heart, as he strolled down the broad, brilliantly illuminated Avenida de Majo. Here he was, walking now on one of the beautiful thoroughfares of the world, money in his pocket, and but a handful of weeks since he had smoked his pipe on the veranda of the poorhouse. Avenida de Majo! Cosmopolitan street, colorful, placid in leisure, lined with cafes that extended welcome, from their cool interiors out to the clustered chairs and tables on the sidewalk. He lingered a moment on a corner, checked by the haunting melody of a Spanish tune. With a swift rush of exhilaration he recognized the wide doors of the Café Colon. By George, but this was good, too much to expect, the old Colon!

"I wonder—I wonder?" he murmured.

In a large main room he found his answer. There they were on the low balcony, the score of women in clean white dresses, broad sashes of crimson about their waists. Was ever music like theirs! Harp, violins, 'cellos, brass, the complete count of an orchestra that played, serene in its appreciation of listeners who appreciated. It was a drinking crowd, Argentinians, French, Americans, English, mixtures from all parts of the world.

"It is Buenos Aires," John Lane mused; "it is life."

The old seaman chose a small table secluded in the shadow of a palm's heavy foliage. He ordered dark beer, sipped it and laughed at the memory of the poorhouse, a vague, attenuated vista. Dreamily he listened to the distant melody that seemed to rise and fall to the measure of his thoughts. An hour warmed him, drifted by, and gave way to the next. He did not stir, sitting there, lost in contentment.

Later the noisy scraping of a chair against the floor aroused him. He glanced up, astonishment written on his flushed countenance. A massive figure was seated opposite him across the dark, flat surface of the table. Deep-blue eyes, no longer cold, enlivened and mellowed with wine, surveyed him kindly. A harsh voice boomed, its volume startling.

"Pol Roger; Vintage, nineteen five!"

And suddenly, for the first time, John Lane knew Captain Henry of the tramp *Shenandoah*. Between the two seamen were a table, the translucent glow of golden wine, the mysterious bond of life-time spent on blue water. The little man told his story and the big man listened.

"By heaven, Captain Lane," he shouted, "you're a credit to the sea, to all of us!"

The great voice rang out through the room, the louder for a sudden lull in the music. Men smiled, nodded, peered jovially through the fronds of the palm. More wine was brought. The music crashed in leaping crescendos.

"Life is like that, like the music, I mean," said Captain Lane, "a series of peaks and deep valleys. The valleys grow dim in memory; the mountain-tops stand out pointing upward—crests—crests of life. Looming. Mine, captain? My first ship, the bark *Rosalie*. Ordinary seaman—my first voyage as third mate. Oh, a towering peak, I can tell you—then my first command. Drink to that one! It can come but once—and now this night topping them all, the clasp of a shipmate."

Gravely the two shook hands. Wine foamed into the glasses. The bubbles charged upward in a jeweled display. It was two in the morning when they stood at the door breathing the fresh cool air.

"We'll return to the ship," said Captain Henry.

"Separately," John Lane pronounced. "It has been a night of wonder for me, but day has come. We go aboard as we came ashore, captain and third cook."

But the long walk down to the docks was taken together, Captain Henry in expansive mood, the third cook outwardly silent, inwardly reviewing the cup of happiness that

had brimmed to its overflow. He pinched himself mentally. Yes, he was awake—returning to his ship—as in the old days—before the era of the poorhouse. The Home? He contemplated that without rancor, very calmly. True, the John Lane of that episode—it was an episode—seemed at the present, a poor creature, spineless, even pitiable. But now—he drank in great gulps the pungent harbor air cooled by the mild night-wind, laden with the rich smells of the waterfront; fruit ripening on the deck of a Spanish ship close by; frozen meat from the holds of a British refrigerator boat on the opposite bank, the mixed odors of ships from the seven seas resting in port. It all flowed into his heart, for it belonged, was a part of him.

He stared up into the mistiness of a spangled sky.

For a week the winches on the decks screamed and rattled as the cargo was discharged. Came a day of respite and then the *Shenandoah* for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four rang and quivered under the frantic loading of native stevedores. Two shifts of the unionized savages from the interior of the Argentine loaded Quebacho logs under the musical direction of their chanting foremen, ending each concerted haul with their long melancholy wail. Upward from the dim depths of the cavernous hold came the echoing music, the inseparable accompaniment of their labor.

John Lane, third cook, went about his work, calmly content in the ordered confusion of the tramp which daily settled lower in the water of her berth. Presently she passed out to sea, unnoticed in the febrile activity of the seaport, except for the fussy guidance of an absurdly self-important little tug-boat. Miles out, the pilot swung over the rail, waved a hand and in his launch coasted down the green slope of an advancing comber. He steered directly for the slowly moving bulk of an American passenger ship, her decks crowded with people looking in toward the flashing glare of the distant city, staring interestedly at the clumsily constructed bridge of the *Shenandoah*, pointing, land-hungry, at the pilot's launch. It was, to them, the tossing harbinger of solid earth, a tiny speck on the expanse of water, and yet despite its lack of size, heavy with significance.

It approached swiftly the great steamer which it would lead in, to South America, to lights, restaurants, streets, women, shops, land life. "Picking up the pilot!" A commonplace to the uninterested, to the unthinking. But to the others, perhaps few, a symbol rich in romance, pregnant with questing lure, the outflung post of a continent. And so, John Lane read it and turned to peel potatoes. As his hands dipped into the tepid water in the bucket, for a moment his mind surveyed the old tramp.

There she was, lumbering seaward, the captain and third mate busy on the bridge, the first mate forward struggling with the lines, the second mate aft, stowing the after-lines. Far down below in the vibrating clatter of the engine-room, he visualized the white-faced engineers, the oilers streaked with grease, cautiously feeling the plunging pistons, and then through the short connecting passage, the lurid gloom of the fireroom. There in the hot blast of the boilers, swaying figures of men sliced and shoveled, and dabbed greasy sweat rags at their streaming faces. As a whole, a splendid picture of the vital labor of the ship and its crew—an inspiring concept to an old sea-captain.

The panorama, partly actual, partly imaginative, faded, and the parts blended in the final scene. As if from far off, John Lane looked down at the galley door and saw sitting there on an up-turned box, the bent figure of a tired, old, infinitely wearied man—peeling potatoes, remembering, and lo! the worn countenance was smiling, as if in supreme content.

The north-bound voyage was begun.

JOHN LANE continued, peeled innumerable potatoes. He grew perceptibly thinner as the ship lost the temperate weather of the southern seas and forged steadily deeper into the sweltering fringes of equatorial waters. The *Shenandoah* was a furnace, her iron decks so unbearably hot that the men almost ran about their duties, dodging from shelter to shelter, the awning aft, the covered passages, inboard, wherever there was a patch of shade. The sea was an endless flat of blue glass, of crystal hardness, flecked with glittering plates of gold that flashed, blinding, under the stabbing glare of a yellow sun. Officers snarled their orders, then grinned and cursed the heat; the men sullenly shirked every effort beyond the

immediate task of getting the ship along. A young seaman suggested a "Father Neptune Party."

"We cross the line today," he told the seamen's messroom.

An old sailor looked at him heavily.

"You —— young fool!" he said.

John Lane, bearing a platter of potatoes, grinned. The men ate on in silence. After the bolted supper they went out on deck for the evening loaf. They nudged each other in keen amusement as the harsh grinding of the ventilators on the boat-deck told of the firemen below, frantically trying to catch a puff of air and bring it down into the inferno of the stoke-hole. The wide, yawning mouth of the starboard ventilator described a complete circle; sullenly it twisted back over its range and then as if hopeless, came to rest in its original position.

The third engineer, dripping, came out of the engine-room passage, swung his lean body up over the galley to the boat deck and stood panting by the tall ventilator staring about the sea with somber young eyes. When he turned to go below, the youth's face was like a wilted flower. It was a startlingly beautiful face, dreamy, girlish and strong, strong with the strength of disillusionment and the hard imprint of the sea. John Lane smiled, a little wistful, as he heard him, cursing, pass the galley door.

"Ho, there, third," he called, "take this boy."

The engineer unsmilingly drank two dippers of cooled tea.

"Thanks, doc," he muttered and turned to go below.

The heat persisted.

When John Lane was called at five next morning he surveyed with a sinking sense of dismay the tossing figures in the two bunks opposite. Flushed faces were turned now toward him, now away toward the bulkhead. The eyes roamed wildly in the sockets and then for a moment came to a flickering stop and gazed hollowly, unseeingly at him.

"Good lord!" the third cook exclaimed.

He pulled on his cotton trousers, slipped his undershirt over his head and hurried forward to call the steward.

Thus simply, began the week of hell for the ship's company of the *Shenandoah*. In each man's life it became later one of those pay streaks of reminiscence that stand out in sailors' lives, burning peaks against the dull levels of sea routine. Half the crew were confined to their bunks. Every man who could get about was put on double shifts. The morale of the ship was strained, but it held steady at a low ebb. The week went on, the ship went on, beneath the torture of a pitiless sun. And as is so often, almost invariably the result of such tests, the figures of exceptional men rose, towering above the lesser figures of their mates.

Here on the fever-ship there were two. The captain, isolated in his responsibility, lonely in command, indisputably held the ship's company against collapse. His huge bulk was on the bridge, was forward, midships, aft. Once, violating all sea tradition, he went below down the deep well to the engineroom and met no hostile glance from the engineers. This was no time to resent the "Deck's" intrusion. He was the "Old Man;" that was all. Tight-lipped, grim, he studied his ship, far out of the steamer lanes. Then he saw the steward go under.

That morning he sent for John Lane. Behind the closed door of the stateroom, for five minutes, Captain Henry talked. No word that was said ever came out of that little room, but the boatswain walking forward with lowered head raised it to stare as he saw the old third cook come out of the passage. John Lane was stiffly, viciously grinning. And the grin was cold and hard and very good to see.

WITH the passing of the next few days—weeks, months, years, eternities—the grin became an irritation to those who saw it. It ceased to bring courage to the weakened fever-torn men and in their sickness, appeared to exist of itself, to have being, separate and distinct from the haggard death-mask of its wearer. It became fixed, mechanical, lifeless. Then the pendulum of the ship's opinion and fancy swung back and the helpless seamen, served and in several cases saved through the tireless nursing of the third cook came to peer anxiously for the grinning aperture in the chalky face. More than one man pinned his hope on that symbol of live courage. While the little old third cook grinned, death was balked. They felt it; they told themselves that they knew it.

And in time came convalescence and in the blurred vague period of its coming John Lane lay down and then the ghastly

pallor of his countenance was broken only by a pair of crazed eyes and a thin line of locked lips. The grin was gone, beaten. In his moments of consciousness, he was nursed, it seemed to him, by an eager parade of every man on the *Shenandoah*. Most of them came and only looked. Many smiled. He heard one curse and saw him stumble out of the compartment. Shipmates.

He seldom came out of a stupor and failed to see Captain Henry at the side of his bunk. Often he felt the gentle touch of the huge hands, rubbing, soothing. He was unable to eat now. His countenance a sheet of wax. He was sinking swiftly. Dreamless stupors, dark. Intolerable cold. Icy cold.

Then one day, or was it night, John Lane swam up from the stilling waters of great depths. He swam feebly to the surface and emerging, drifted into life, to see Captain Henry's face close to his.

"I want to go—to the bridge," he whispered and his eyes told the intensity of his desire. In their hollow depths blazed the pleading of his unconquerable spirit, the last appeal to a fellow craftsman.

The big captain shook his head.

Again came the faint whisper:

"—— to the bridge."

Captain Henry breathed hard, then stared down into the gray eyes. For a long moment he seemed to study what was in them. Suddenly he straightened. His lips were compressed as he gave quiet orders. He stooped over the bed and gently lifted the shrunken figure into his huge arms. A little procession of rough, uncultured men followed him silently to the bridge. They walked on their toes.

In a big chair at the wheel they placed John Lane, his hands on the varnished spokes. The polished rim slowly turning from time to time gave semblance that he steered the ship, in actuality controlled from the other wheel on the flying-bridge above.

The sea stretched out, unending, before John Lane, its dark expanse cut cleanly by a shifting path of moon silver that gleamed and writhed to the horizon. Straight into the silvered radiance, Captain Lane steered the ship, and the beauty, the peace, the grandeur of the sea, flooded the mind of the master mariner. It was swept clean of memory, of prophecy. There was just the present. And the present was radiant and secure—the hazy contemplation of the ship creaking on over the wide night sea beneath the splendor of the constellations. The old man never saw the group that formed in a half circle behind him; men of the sea. He heard no muffled whisper but he felt the drive, the power of their thought. It was real, it was human, and the divine was in its humanness, and clearly it spoke:

"Steer on, captain, steer on. Hold to the course."

The dim-lit wheelhoouse became lost in a gray obscurity, the compass faded into the shadows; there was only the ship, the sea, the starred heavens and a brief remaining fragment of life. Life! Death! What did it matter? He was at the wheel, steering the ship, holding the course.

The whitening embers of his life flamed for an instant in the wonder of the realization that he was dying, splendidly dying—on the bridge of a ship—his ship!

The stars grew dim, vanished group by group, melted into a deep black void. John Lane's filming eyes stared out to sea—across the darkling waters—

Stilled waters——

The white head slipped slowly forward against the rim of the wheel. A vagrant current of air drifting low, came into the wheelhouse and with pure caress bore out over the clean ocean, into the whispering winds, the breath of John Lane.

The Towers of Silence

by R. T. M. SCOTT

Author of "Find the Man," "Into the East," etc.

THE humid, bazaar-laden air of Bombay hung heavily in the office of the American consul. A sleepy coolie, with a cord tied to one of his toes, pulled fitfully at a *punka* and succeeded in accentuating, if anything, the humidity and the rancid odors of cooking *ghee* from the native quarters. The consul, himself, looked regretfully at his golf clubs and mopped his forehead as two late visitors were announced by his native boy.

As a slim, dark-eyed girl entered with a powerfully built man, the consul advanced with outstretched hand.

"Miss Mathewson," he said, "I hope you have found your father, the senator."

"No," replied the girl and it was evident that she was laboring under severe mental strain, "but I have brought daddy's secretary, Mr. Jennings. We think that—perhaps—" she hesitated—"that nothing had better be done for a day or so."

"But that seems strange," returned the consul; "and besides, I have already taken certain steps in the matter."

"Better stop them at once," interposed the secretary. "Senator Mathewson is a pretty powerful man and it would go hard with any of our consuls who did not pay attention to his daughter's wishes."

As he spoke, Jennings lighted a cigaret in a careless manner and flicked, with his cane, the American flag which hung upon the consulate wall. The speech had been arrogant and his whole manner was offensive.

"I am afraid," replied the consul with quiet gravity, "that I can not stop the investigation of the senator's disappearance unless you will give me sufficient reason for doing so."

Jennings, a heavy-set man with sandy hair and light-blue eyes, smiled sarcastically.

"I think," he said, "that you have been away from home too long. You are not familiar with American politics. Sometimes politicians like to disappear. It is very convenient when they don't wish to receive telegrams."

"Of course if you are sure that Senator Mathewson is merely traveling incognito for a few days," returned the consul, "I shall try to arrange with the British authorities so that no investigation is continued—if any has been started."

"Thanks," replied Jennings; "and now one more service. Miss Mathewson and I would like to be married tomorrow morning in the American consulate. I have made all arrangements and a clergyman will be here at ten o'clock."

The consul looked at Miss Mathewson who was gazing at the floor. He was almost sure that he saw a tear in her eye. At all events she was an exceedingly unhappy bride-to-be. He was about to speak when a native servant entered.

"Smith *sahib*, calling."

"Tell him I will see him in a few minutes," directed the consul.

The servant turned to withdraw when a tall man, loose limbed and lanky, brushed by and entered the room.

"My name is Smith, Mr. Turner," he said, addressing the consul. "I came over to investigate that little matter of the missing senator."

"This is Miss Mathewson, the senator's daughter," returned the consul, "and Mr. Jennings, secretary to Senator Mathewson. We were just discussing the case."

"We want the matter dropped at once," broke in Jennings.

"Why?" asked Smith, regarding the stocky Jennings with an indolent eye which traveled from head to foot.

"It's a matter of politics and, being English, you may not understand. You see—" Jennings hesitated.

"You mean that Senator Mathewson wishes to drop out of sight so that he can not be communicated with?" asked Smith.

"Well, yes," admitted Jennings.

"Easily done in India without worrying his daughter," retorted Smith. "The whole lot of you could drop out of sight by altering the route you travel. Give me a better reason or I must continue the investigation."

"I think we had better go, Miss—ah, Beatrice," said Jennings, turning to the door. "Nothing more can be done here—until tomorrow morning."

The girl turned with an involuntary shudder and the two were about to depart when Smith, with a couple of long strides, placed himself between them and the door.

"Just a minute," he said. "Let me see if I have this right. At nine o'clock this morning Senator Mathewson and his secretary left the Taj Mahal Hotel in two 'rickshaws and went to Esplanade Road where Mr. Jennings stopped at a store and bought half a dozen soft collars, size sixteen. Am I right?"

"Yes," replied Jennings; "but I refuse to answer any more questions at present."

"From there," continued Smith, "you went to the native quarter and stopped at the Bhendi Bazaar to view the Arab horses on sale there. Am I right?"

There was no reply. Miss Mathewson stood nervously rolling a tiny ball of a handkerchief in her ungloved hand while Jennings puffed his cigaret and blew the smoke toward the waving *punka*.

"At the bazaar," went on Smith, "you dismissed your rickshaws and overpaid the coolies by three rupees."

"The beggars said we didn't give them enough," exclaimed Jennings.

"Thanks! I thought I was right."

Jennings looked annoyed and sullenly remained silent.

"From the bazaar," continued Smith, "you engaged a gharry and drove off toward Malabar Hill. Your rickshaw coolies waited around until you left, hoping that you would change your mind and use them. They were not, however, sufficiently interested to learn your destination. Am I right?"

Jennings silently blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

"So?" questioned Smith with a dry laugh. "You have become a veritable tower of silence?"

Jennings started slightly and looked keenly at his questioner, but he met eyes quite as keen and tinged, perhaps, with some of the subtle cunning of the East.

"I see that you have a 'Murray's Guide' in your pocket," said Smith, taking a step nearer. "It contains a map of Bombay and will show what lies in the direction you took after leaving the Bhendi Bazaar."

As he spoke, Smith's long arm shot out and the book was extracted from Jennings' pocket with astonishing dexterity.

"What the ——!" exclaimed Jennings angrily.

"Remember that the lady whom you hope to marry is present," cautioned Smith very calmly.

"How did you know that?" Jennings demanded involuntarily.

"The same way that I knew of your purchase of half a dozen number sixteen collars," Smith drawled, "and the same way I know that you drink White Horse whisky and soda in public but omit the soda in private."

"I will not be insulted any further!" exclaimed Jennings, white with anger.

As he was speaking, Smith had carelessly opened the red-covered guide-book, allowing the pages to separate as they pleased. Three times he had done this as if the action were entirely without thought. Suddenly he closed the book and handed it back.

"After all," he said, "I probably know Bombay better than the chap who wrote this book. My investigation, for the moment, has ceased. Good day."

As the two left the room, the girl with down-cast eyes, a native servant entered noiselessly and unannounced. Tall and straight he stood in his snow-white uniform surmounted by a huge turban of many yards of material cunningly wrapped about his head.

"What have you to report?" asked Smith.

"*Sahib*," replied the boy, "Jennings *sahib* get registered letter from America. I pay one rupee to Jennings *sahib's* boy to steal letter after Jennings *sahib* asleep tonight. Will pay one rupee more after letter stolen."

Smith smiled at the American consul.

"You are learning some of my secrets," he said. "Anything more?" he asked of the boy.

"Jennings *sahib* got seventeen handkerchiefs and corn on little toe," added the boy. "Not leave pistol in suitcase today. Must have in pocket."

"Did you make present to missie *sahib's ayah?*" asked Smith.

"*Sahib*," replied the boy, "I take nice papaya fruit and silver bracelet. *Ayah* very much like missie *sahib*. Missie *sahib* not happy. Cry all time when alone."

"Missie *sahib* love Jennings *sahib?*"

"*Nahin, sahib*," answered the boy. "Jennings *sahib nahin atcha sahib*—not good *sahib*. Missie *sahib* not like him."

"Why?"

"*Sahib*, boy not know," answered the native, looking mortified. "Perhaps just because not good *sahib*."

"You are a good boy—" the native's eyes glistened— "go and find out more."

Silently the servant salaamed and vanished through the door like a shadow while Smith turned to the consul.

"A faithful Indian servant," he said, "is the most valuable tool that a secret service agent can possess. Native servants know every move that their masters make—almost their very thoughts—and they gossip continually. They offer a treasure house of information for the agent of the Criminal Intelligence Department. For a long time it was not known that I worked this way and even now I wish you would not speak of it. By the way, have you a 'Murray's Guide,' Mr. Turner?"

"I have heard at the club of your marvelous ability," replied the consul, reaching for a red-covered book. "It is most interesting to watch you at work. If I can be of assistance, please say so."

"Thanks," replied Smith, turning to a certain page in the book. "Ah, there is something here which may be significant. Jennings' guide-book was a new one and three times it opened naturally to page 16, showing that he had been paying particular attention to that page. You may remember that, by accident, I called him a tower of silence and the phrase struck him so that he started quite visibly. You will remember also that I traced his movements this morning up to the point where he drove off with the senator in the direction of Malabar Hill."

"Yes," replied the consul. "I didn't notice the fellow start when you compared him to a tower of silence but how do these things connect?"

"In the first place," answered Smith, "the man showed alarm when I called him a tower of silence. In the second place, they drove toward Malabar Hill where are situated the five Parsi Towers of Silence. In the third place, page 16 of 'Murray's Guide' gives the only description of these towers that is contained in the book."

"Strange," commented the consul, "but it may be a coincidence."

"True," replied Smith, "but half an hour before you telephoned about the missing senator, the old Parsi guardian of the inner gate was found under a flowering bush—knocked on the head."

The consul gave a whistle of surprize.

"What story did he tell when he came to his senses?"

"He is dead," said Smith.

"Do you think that the disappearance of the senator is connected with the murder?" asked the consul in astonishment.

There was a patter of bare feet outside in the hall and a native urchin burst into the room by diving between the legs of the consul's servant. He was very small and as hot and dusty as a *chokra* well can be. With the agility of a monkey he darted to Smith, breaking into a stream of native chatter that seemed like so much gibberish to the consul.

Smith listened attentively and replied in the vernacular and patted the youngster on his bare head, causing him to wriggle with joy.

"Good boy!" he added in English. "Go and report to Langa Doonh. He may be

in the courtyard of the Taj Mahal Hotel."

If the *chokra* had entered the room with alacrity he left it like a rocket, only hesitating for a moment to stick out his tongue at the grave consulate servant whose dignity was greatly insulted.

"We are making progress," said Smith. "The *gharry-wallah*, who drove Jennings and the senator from the Bhendi Bazaar, has been found. He drove the two of them to the outer enclosure of the towers and, one hour later, drove Jennings back alone."

"You work fast," commented the consul, "and things are looking serious. What will you do now?"

Smith regarded the consul keenly for a moment.

"Would you care for an adventure and a chance to see something which no white man may ever have seen?" he asked.

"I should prefer it to golf," was the quick reply.

"I can not promise that you will not be killed," added Smith.

The consul's eye flickered over the stars and stripes upon the wall.

"What time will you be ready?" he asked simply.

Smith noticed the glance and walked over to the wall, taking a fold of the flag in his hand.

"I, too, was born under it," he said with his back turned. Then, facing about, he added:

"I will meet you at the Byculla Club between ten and eleven. Be dressed in gray flannels. Better pack a gun and a flask of brandy."

IT WAS several hours later that Jennings stood before his dresser in his room at the Taj Mahal Hotel and poured himself a liberal glass of White Horse whisky. From the expression on his face things had not been going entirely to his satisfaction. He gulped the whisky neat and set the glass down impatiently as a knock came at his door. Crossing the room he jerked open the door and the tall form of Smith lounged into the room. If anything had been needed to complete Jennings' bad frame of mind it was the appearance of Smith.

"Get the —— out!" he ejaculated viciously.

"Willingly," drawled Smith, "if you will join me. I am searching for Senator Mathewson and I think that, if you care to come, we will not have to go quite as far as the place you mentioned."

"I am afraid that it will take more than English wit to discover Senator Mathewson if he doesn't wish to be found," replied Jennings scornfully. "However, I will come. It may digest my dinner and pass the evening in an amusing way."

So it was that a *gharry*, containing the lanky Smith and the stocky Jennings, threaded its way through the streets of Bombay northward toward the outlying district where lay the Byculla Club.

On the driver's seat sat a grimy native who slouched his rather large frame in true *gharry-wallah* style. Once Smith, speaking in Hindustani, addressed him as Langa Doonh but, otherwise, there was nothing to indicate that he was the same immaculately dressed servant who had reported to Smith that afternoon in the office of the American consul.

Curled up on the springs at the back of the *gharry*, and almost invisible, was the monkeylike *chokra* who had darted in and out of the consulate. The actors in the drama were assembling to play their parts.

There was little conversation between the two in the carriage. As the central part of the city was left behind and the street lights became farther apart Smith leaned back in his corner almost unseen in the gray clothes he was wearing. Jennings, on the contrary, sat forward puffing a cigar the burning end of which showed up the white front of his shirt as his dinner-jacket opened in the breeze.

At the Byculla Club there was no delay. At a hundred yards distance the horse slowed down to a walk while a small dark figure darted forward unseen from behind the *gharry*. Upon the steps of the club, as they arrived, was the American consul dressed in gray flannels.

"Evening, Mr. Turner," said Smith. "I think we can crowd into the rear seat."

Then to the driver he added:

"Malabar Hill *jaol*"

As the *gharry* started off Jennings turned to Smith and spoke in a low and rather contrained voice.

"You are going to Malabar Hill?"

"Yes," drawled Smith as he hunched himself back between his two companions. "The moon will soon be up and we should

have a good view. I thought we would have a look at the Towers of Silence."

"The Parsi burial towers?" asked Turner.

"They are not exactly burial towers," explained Smith, "although they achieve that end. The Parsis place their dead, naked, upon the open top of the towers and the vultures peck 'em clean in about half an hour. Heard about the towers, Jennings?"

"Yes," snapped Jennings, "but what has all this to do with Senator Mathewson?"

"He was last seen entering the outer enclosure of the towers," returned Smith, lighting a cigaret and cupping his hand to shield the match so that the light fell on Jennings' face. "The grounds have been thoroughly searched and tonight—" puff—"I am going to search the towers."

"But no white man is allowed to enter the towers," argued Jennings, having difficulty with his cigar. "Even when the Prince of Wales visited the place he was only shown a model of them."

"Well," drawled Smith, feeling in the side pocket next to Jennings for more matches, "I visit a good many places that the Prince of Wales will never see. In India the Criminal Intelligence Department must see and know just about everything. Now tonight—" Smith turned directly to Jennings—"I do not think that it would be best for you actually to enter the tower, but I want you on hand for a witness in case we find the senator."

"What possible reason can you have for thinking that the senator is in one of the towers?" asked Jennings whose cigar had gone out.

"Only a bazaar rumor," returned Smith, "and that reminds me that I don't want any rumors about tonight's expedition. If possible it must be quite secret. I will take all responsibility, but the British authorities would be very angry if we caused hard feeling toward the white race to arise among the followers of Zoroaster. Violating their towers of the dead would very seriously offend them."

The drive from the Byculla Club to Malabar Hill was about three miles. As the ground rose the cooler evening breezes from the Indian Ocean swept back the smell of the city the lights of which spread out in panorama with the curving bay beyond. Above them was the intense blue of the star-studded Indian sky.

It was close to midnight when the *gharry* came to a sudden halt in a secluded spot high upon the hill. Silently Smith descended and led the way to a spot some hundred yards distant beside a low wall.

"This is the easiest place to cross the enclosure," he said and vaulted over.

Jennings and the consul followed while the tall, gray-clad figure wound its way without the slightest hesitation through a number of shrubs and bushes. At last the two behind found him waiting beside a towering wall.

"This far I have had everything prepared—" Smith spoke in a low voice—"but, from now on, we must exercise the greatest caution and depend pretty much upon our wits."

Smith took a pace outward from the wall and gently clapped his hands three times. There was a swish and something fell almost at their feet. Against the gray wall hung a rope ladder.

"A Hindu servant," explained Smith. "He cares nothing for the religion of Zoroaster and he knows how to keep his mouth shut. I will go first."

In a few minutes the three gained the summit of the wall where a native boy crouched beside them. On the inside the rapid rise of the ground made the descent much less and the three white men found themselves in a garden of flowering shrubs whose beauty and fragrance is seldom excelled, even in the East.

For a minute Smith stood listening while he scanned the ghost-like, gray towers which could be seen in the distance above the bushes. He spoke a few words in Hindustani to the native boy and strode off among the bushes followed closely by Jennings and the consul. Beside a tall cypress, tapering upward like a finger toward heaven, he halted once more.

"Yonder is the tower we will search," he said, indicating a gray mass of stonework. "It is the only one which has not been locked, and is, therefore, the only one which the senator could have stumbled into. Mr. Jennings, you will wait here by this tree and keep low down. I will call you you if I need you."

Jennings said nothing, and again Smith moved on followed by the consul. At the base of the tower the two men leaned silently, their gray clothes blending well with the gray wall. Not a word was spoken.

Suddenly a little figure darted from a near-by bush and threw itself upon the ground about twenty-five feet from the tower. Immediately the native boy ran out from some trees carrying a long bamboo pole which he placed upon the ground so that it stretched from the tower to the tiny figure which had first appeared. The boy, having placed the pole, withdrew and the silence of midnight prevailed. Only beauty, fragrance and—perhaps—mystery reigned in the soft moonlight.

With a few low words of direction to hold the butt firmly against the tower, Smith ran outward toward the smaller end of the pole. Quickly he picked it up and walked inward raising the pole higher and higher as, hand over hand, he approached the tower. Bending somewhat at first, the long bamboo assumed a perpendicular position. Clinging to the top was the young *chokra* and dangling from one of his hands was a slender rope-ladder.

Twenty-five feet above the ground the little figure seemed scarcely to touch the top of the tower before Smith commenced walking backward again while pole and *chokra* descended—but the rope-ladder hung down the gray wall. No sooner was the urchin upon the ground than he was off into some bushes while the native boy ran forward and vanished with the pole. Not a second had been lost and not a hitch had occurred.

Smith was the first to ascend the ladder, and the consul, upon following, found him seated upon the outer wall which circled the top. In the intense starlight, fast being augmented by a rising moon, the plan of the tower's top could be plainly seen.

THE open top resembled a circular gridiron gently depressed toward the center in which was a well or shaft about five feet in diameter. Besides a circular wall which enclosed this well there were two other circular walls between it and the outside where the two men sat. Footpaths ran upon the circular walls and the spaces between were divided into compartments by other walls radiating from an imaginary center.

"In these compartments," said Smith, speaking low, "the 'Carriers of the Dead' place the bodies. The corpse is stripped of all clothing and deposited here for the vultures to eat. In half an hour nothing but a skeleton remains. The 'Carriers of the Dead' then return and remove the bones with tongs, dropping them down the well where they crumble away—rich and poor alike as Zartasht said must be."

"Are there any, er, bodies or skeletons here now?" asked the consul.

"I hope not, but we will see," answered Smith. "In this outside row of compartments are placed the bodies of all males of adult age. Circle the wall to the right while I go to the left. Examine each compartment and remember that the vultures would transform a clothed body into a bundle of rags with here and there a bone protruding."

Slowly the two figures circled the outer wall peering down into the compartments. They met on the side of the tower opposite to the rope-ladder.

"Nothing," said the consul.

"Let us circle on an inner wall," said Smith, "and examine the middle compartments where the women's bodies are placed."

Once more the two turned apart and circled back toward the ladder. In the distance the monotonous beating of a native drum broke forth accompanying a weird chant which was repeated over and over again in a wailing voice.

The time and the place were best suited to the strongest nerves, and the consul, bending low to examine a compartment, lifted his head suddenly as the tom-tom broke out into a louder swell, and he took a false step. The next moment he tripped over something and fell, with a soft thud, into one of the compartments. At that very instant Smith had halted to watch the hook of the ladder which was sagging under some weight.

The consul was not hurt by his fall but, before he could climb out, Smith was by his side with hand outstretched.

"Hurt?" he asked, and, when Turner replied in the negative: "Good! We must be quick now. I think you have stumbled over the key to the mystery. You fell over the ladder which reaches down to the bones in the well. Somebody took it out of the well for no good purpose."

As he finished speaking, Smith lifted the ladder and carried it inward toward the central shaft.

"The inside compartments," he called softly over his shoulder, "are for the bodies

of children. Run around and look at them while I place the ladder."

Turner quickly circled the inside wall and reached Smith again as he was lowering the ladder down the black hole. He lowered it very gently at the end and turned to the consul.

"I must ask you to go down," he said. "I have no time to explain, but you will find bones—dry bones—and, perhaps, Senator Mathewson."

To descend at midnight into a dark well with the prospect of alighting upon a heap of human bones is far from pleasant. There was something, however, in Smith's voice which made the consul square his shoulders and step over the wall without a word.

Scarcely had Turner's head disappeared when Smith bounded back over the connecting walls to the ladder, his rubber-soled shoes making no sound. Gently he felt the overhanging rope. There was no weight upon it. He turned to retrace his steps when a dark figure with a white shirt-front rose from a compartment almost beside him.

"Found anything, Mr. Detective?" came the sarcastic voice of Jennings.

"So—" Smith's voice showed no excitement—"I thought I told you to stay by the cypress tree."

"You may think as you like and I will do as I like," was the surly reply.

"Very well," answered Smith walking back toward the yawning mouth of the dark well followed by Jennings, "I think that you left Senator Mathewson down there after drawing up the ladder. If he is dead it will mean a double murder charge against you. Perhaps you don't know that the old Parsi died shortly after you struck him on the head. Now what are you going to do?"

Jennings' breath drew in with an angry sucking sound as he turned slightly and balanced a revolver on his bent left arm, the barrel directed toward Smith. The two men were but a few yards apart and near the edge of the well. In the moonlight they were plainly visible to each other.

Smith was silent for a moment before drawling a question.

"You would make matters better by making them worse?"

Before Jennings could reply the top of the ladder trembled and voices were dimly heard becoming louder as they ascended. First appeared the head of an elderly man and behind came the consul with protecting arms around the upper figure.

"I found him asleep," said Turner. "He has been down there all day. The well throws the voice straight up and he couldn't attract help."

The two climbed over the edge of the well and the old man sat upon the edge of the wall resting wearily as he glanced about. Jennings had turned a little more sidewise so that the revolver, in the crook of his left arm, could only be seen by Smith.

"This is Senator Mathewson," said the consul, looking in surprize at Jennings whom he had not expected to see.

"I don't understand what happened," said the senator weakly. "My secretary took the old gate-keeper aside and bribed him behind some bushes. Then we hurried up some steps and through a small square opening in the side of the tower. I was foolish enough to descend into the well and immediately the ladder was drawn up. I shouted, but no one came."

"Perhaps," said Smith and he gave no sign that he was looking into the muzzle of a revolver, "your secretary may care to explain just why he did draw up the ladder and leave you behind."

Jennings suddenly dropped his left arm and the revolver in his right hand wavered between the three men opposite to him.

"The game is up," he said in low, growling tones, "and I must fight my way out. You were pretty clever, Smith, when you picked this gun out of my pocket in the crowded carriage and unloaded it before putting it back. I discovered the trick, however, and reloaded the gun. The first bullet will be straight through your forehead and then, I think, the consul and the dear senator can spend the rest of the night down the well."

Not a move did Smith make as Jennings spoke but the consul half rose and then stopped as the revolver came to rest in his direction.

"You thundering villain!" burst out the senator and would have sprung forward had not the consul laid a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

A dry chuckle came from Smith.

"You have me beaten," he said very simply, "but God is great; or, as the Hindu says, '*Khudda bara hai!*' "

Ever so little had Smith's voice been raised in speaking the Hindustani words. On the last word, as if it had been a signal, a dark figure rose from a near-by compartment and a quick eye might have distinguished the gleam of a knife as it flashed through the moonlight. There was a gasping, gurgling sound and the form of Jennings tottered as he grasped at his throat before falling in a convulsion into the compartment behind him.

"Quick!" exclaimed Smith to the consul. "Get the senator away. The *chokra* will guide you through the shrubbery."

Once the consul and his charge had descended from the tower, Smith and a dark-skinned native followed. At the foot of the tower Smith paused.

"Langa Doonh," he asked, "you struck true?"

"*Sahib*, it was the only way."

"And you searched the clothing?"

Silently the boy extended a small handkerchief-wrapped bundle from which protruded the dark muzzle of a revolver.

Smith took the bundle and laid one hand on his servant's shoulder in token of his approval. The next minute he jerked the rope-ladder free with a violent upward cast. As it fell the native seized it and disappeared into the shadows. When Smith reached the waiting *gharry*, containing the consul and the senator, Langa Doonh sat upon the driver's seat, dressed in his dirty costume.

At a street light on the outskirts of the city the *gharry* stopped while Smith handed a typewritten paper to Senator Mathewson.

"Your daughter's *ayah*," he said, "stole this paper from your daughter—for a consideration consisting of some fruit and a silver bracelet."

Slowly the old man read the document while understanding grew in his eyes.

"My daughter" (he read) "I have only a moment to write that my political future will be wrecked and that disgrace will reach me if Mr. Jennings makes public certain information in his possession. His price is your hand. Do as you think best If the price is too great I must now say 'Good-by' forever."

There followed the senator's signature or, at least, what seemed to be such.

"The whole thing is a —— forgery!" exploded the senator. "What happened to the scoundrel on the tower? I could not quite see."

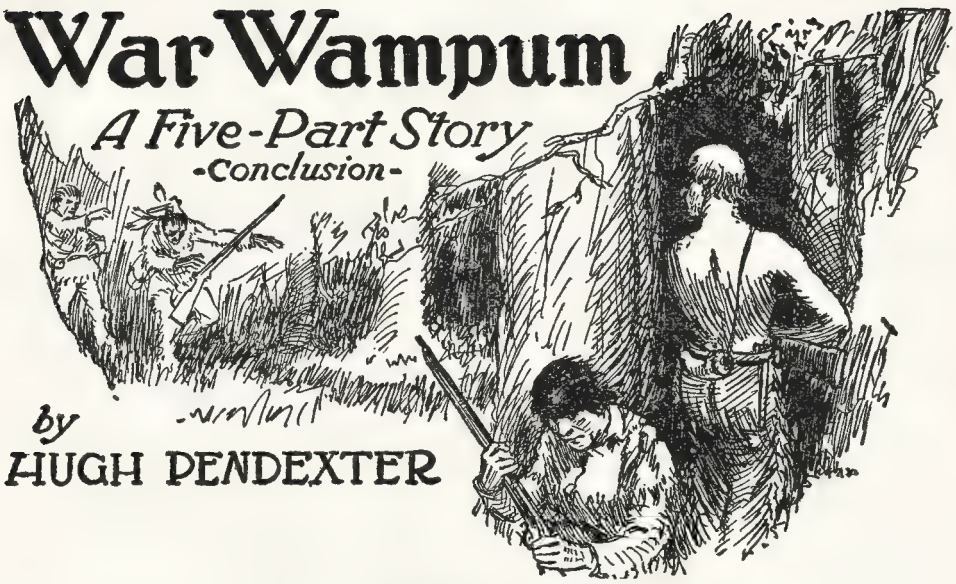
Smith, however, would not answer and it was not until the following evening that Senator Mathewson guessed the truth when the American consul handed him a clipping from a local paper.

Much indignation has been aroused (the clipping stated) in Parsi circles by the discovery that one of their sacred Towers of Silence has been violated by a European during the night. The miscreant, however, paid for his misdemeanor with his life. In some way he must have stumbled and fallen rendering himself unconscious. He was discovered one hour after sunrise but nothing remained except what appeared to be a bag of bones, the vultures having so badly torn the clothing in their efforts to get at the flesh. Some bits of hair from the scalp were all that indicated that he was a white man.

War Wampum

A Five-Part Story

-Conclusion-



by HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "The White Dawn," "Pay Gravel," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

MONTREAL had fallen and the Lilies were vanishing from the strongholds of Canada. Left without the support of their French allies, the Indians banded together to stand against the now dominant English. Pontiac directed the reign of terror and slaughter along the forest paths of the Alleghanies.

From Sandusky two forest-runners, Enoch Meekly and James Ballou, traveled eastward in desperate haste to locate and warn Colonel Bouquet that Presq' Isle, Le Bœuf and Venango had fallen. Night overtook them two miles from Bushy Run, where their friend Steve Marks and his family lived; and, made uneasy by the prevalence of so many savages in the woods, the two runners went on at fresh speed.

They approached the place cautiously and found what they feared—a crowd of Indians besieging the Markses' cabin. They concealed themselves and saw Steve trying to make peace with the red chief, and killed treacherously from behind in consequence.

There were five other white men defending the cabin, and these decided to attempt an escape to the Byerly house a short distance away. Meekly and Ballou managed to join them; and the party, thus strengthened, retreated in the darkness on guard against the pursuing devils. Ballou learned that Marks' daughter, Nell, had been captured.

"Good God!" he babbled.

No one dared think what would happen to her in the hands of the savages.

The little band reached the Byerly place and spent a hideous night beating off the enemy.

Meanwhile one of the white men, Hance Whit, was frantic to begin the rescue of Nell, and, as a serious rival of Ballou, he fell into a hot quarrel which endangered the lives of all of them. The Indians started a fresh attack; but suddenly they scattered. The whites gave a shout of triumph and rushed out to meet Captain Joseph Dingly and a company of rangers who had come to the rescue.

The party now split up, Whit and Enoch going with Dingly and his men in search of the Marks girl, and Ballou with four others pushing on to carry word to Bouquet and to look for Mrs. Byerly—who was reported to have fled with her small children along the Fort Ligonier road but a short while ago. They saw nothing of the mother but had several encounters with the savages, which resulted in the loss of Smiley and Rickards. Ballou and his remaining companion continued on to the fort and arrived unhurt after running the gantlet of another war-party. The Byerlys had got in safely. Ballou told his news to the officer in command and then made ready, after a short rest, to proceed to his next objective—Bedford and Carlisle.

En route he neared the Shawnee Cabins and met an old Indian wearing a fearful medicine-mask. Black Beaver was alone and starving, and when Ballou gave him food he showed that he was likely to prove a valuable friend. He consulted his medicine and said that he would go with the white man. At first Ballou was suspicious.

"Some trick," he muttered, but he consented nevertheless.

They were within a mile of Bedford when they came upon a number of haymakers fighting for their lives against an onslaught of savages. Black Beaver donned his mask, and the attackers fled.

The whites then hurried to collect their dead and set out for the fort. Ballou was well received and reported to Captain Louis Ourry, who had charge of a pitifully small garrison there.

When he and the captain were by themselves Ourry spoke of the desperate situation the place was in.

"Tell Bouquet I'll hold out as long as I live," he said.

"*War Wampum*," *copyright, 1922, by Hugh Pendexter.*

WHEN Ballou reached Carlisle he found Colonel Bouquet preparing to send aid to Fort Ligonier. The forest-runner was then told by a stranger, who called himself Gregory Dunn, that Nell Marks was the captive of Tamaque at Great Island on the Susquehanna. He learned afterward that Dunn was the "Trade Knife," a notorious renegade and liar.

Ballou was now joined by Meeks again, and with Black Beaver the two white men began the search for the Marks girl. Their first set-back came when Ballou was suddenly captured by the Leni-lenape. As he was being made ready for torture he was taunted with the news that the girl was a prisoner at the stronghold of Pontiac. He would have been burned forthwith if his two friends had not rescued him in the nick of time.

THE two forest-runners and their Indian friend began the journey to Pontiac's stronghold. They ran across the fearful ghost of the previous night, which turned out to be Rickards, half-mad and starving. After helping him as much as possible, they allowed him to accompany them—a decision which later proved of value.

They now headed for Sandusky and, reaching Lake Erie, traveled along a shoreline trail westward. They had proceeded but two or three miles when the crazy Rickards said—

" 'Pears to me some one's comin' behind us."

They prepared an ambush and presently surprized and killed four Leni-lenape who had been trailing them. Journeying on a little farther, they soon learned that Pontiac's camp was near and that they were likely to be caught any time. They stopped, therefore, for a hurried consultation and resolved that if met by any hostile warriors, Ballou was to pose as the Trade Knife with Meekly his prisoner and Black Beaver as guide. They were to be on a mission from Tamaque. Rickards was safe from harm on account of his insanity.

As they had anticipated, they were soon captured and taken at once to Pontiac himself. There followed a long and difficult parley between Ballou and the great chief, during which the white man found out that Nell Marks was probably in camp and certainly destined to be sold to an evil half-breed named the Rat.

Meanwhile the four murdered Indians had been discovered by the Ottawas and brought in; Tamaque was expected any hour; and the position of the four "guests" was growing more and more precarious. Ballou wondered when the crisis would come and what it would be like when it did.

THE Indians were beginning to grow restless, and Pontiac, to divert them, called Ballou to the council-fire to persuade him to burn Meekly. Ballou's refusal to this, while bold, stirred up bad blood; the chief plotted to accomplish the torture by trickery. The Trade Knife was fooled at first, but, becoming suspicious, guessed the game and rescued his friend just in time.

The tension now ran high between the Ottawas and their visitors, but it was lulled by the arrival of a scout who brought the news that the Rat was on his way to camp. Ballou feigned joy at this and to restore good-will said to Pontiac—

"Let the warriors have a little milk (rum) tonight and tell them it is a gift from the Knife."

Then he informed the chief that he wished to see the white woman. Pontiac gave his consent to both proposals reluctantly and presently went with Ballou and Rickards to a hut a mile or so away. There they found Nell Marks, and Ballou succeeded in telling her surreptitiously to prepare to make her escape soon.

By the time the three men returned to the Indian village, preparations were under way for the carousal. Black Beaver slipped into the forest unobserved and, after a prolonged absence, came back in a state of suppressed elation. His friends learned that he had killed the Rat. The forest-runners realized at once that they must rescue the Marks girl with all possible speed and escape.

It was not long before the murdered Rat had been discovered and brought in by the Ottawa scouts, and this new mischance aroused the red-skins to fury. They again demanded that Meekly be burned, and commenced drinking wildly. Suddenly, as night drew down, a warrior shouted—

"Fire on the water!"

"Tamaque is coming! Tamaque is coming!" yelled the savages.

"The real Trade Knife is coming," muttered Ballou as he slipped Meekly's wrist bonds. "I've freshened the priming, Enoch."

CHAPTER X

WHAT THE WHITE WOMAN COST

THOSE who had received their rations of rum lost no time in running down to the landing-place, although considerable time must elapse before the canoes could make the bay. The liquor was served rapidly to those remaining in line. Ballou's anxious eyes shifted from the torches down the lake to the warriors streaming by his fire across the marsh. He was in a trap. The trap would be locked so long as any of the Indians held back from the water. The long line of impatient, thirsty warriors seemed to be moving up to the keg very slowly, but the head of the line crumbled immediately after each dram of the fiery liquor. By ones and twos and in small groups the bulk of the men ran from the kegs to the shore.

Ballou began to feel more easy. The torches apparently were as far away as ever.

"Rickards," he ordered, "go to the white woman. Stay there till I come."

Rickards obediently trotted off, glad to go to the isolated cabin. Ballou said to the Conestoga:

"Let my brother stay here to watch the prisoner until all the warriors are down by

the water. Then do as our white brother says."

To Meekly he said:

"I must be down there with them. Steal away with the Beaver and overpower the guards and take Nell down the shore trail. You'll have time to get her well east of here before they discover she's missing. They can't pick up your trail till morning. I'll try to join you before then. Pontiac will scatter his men widely and some will be sent along the Cuyahoga path, but they will move blindly, and with the Conestoga to fetch up the rear you ought to dodge them easily."

"It'll be death if you stick at the landing after Tamaque's canoes reach the mouth of the bay."

"I'll leave before they get within shouting distance. If by any chance you're pressed close streak ahead with Nell and leave the Conestoga and Rickards to close the trail. I plan to steal a canoe and start before Tamaque makes the bay. The rum and the excitement will give me my chance. We'll need a canoe to make Presqu' Isle. We'll probably need one before we can make the Cuyahoga. There goes the last of them except Sleeping Wolf."

"He waits to walk with Pontiac, Ninivos, and Take. Good-by. Tell Nell why I couldn't help fetch her out of the cabin. Good luck."

Their hands met for a moment; then Ballou was leaving the fire and joyfully crying out to Pontiac:

"The medicine of the *manitos*' child was strong. He said many canoes were coming. Look! Soon Tamaque and his braves will be here. The Knife hopes there will be a little milk left for his red father and the Leni-lenape."

"There is much milk," assured the war-chief. "Tamaque and his children will forget they are lame and tired from paddling."

The four red men and Ballou hurried on to the shore. Already the canoes had seen the torches kindled by the dancing, whooping savages, and were swinging their own flaring knots of pine in greeting. The howling ceased for a moment and faintly came the sound of the Leni-lenape singing.

"Let Sleeping Wolf and his strongest men go and meet them," ordered Pontiac.

This was a danger Ballou had not planned for. The Wolf selected his men and soon his canoe was shooting to meet the flotilla outside the bay, followed by the yells of the excited savages. Once the Wolf came within easy hailing distance of the foremost Delaware canoe and announced himself as the representative of the great Pontiac he would be informed that Tamaque and the Trade Knife were in command of the Delawares. Ballou could picture the Wolf's great amazement on hearing the name of the Knife. There would be a few moments of stupefaction, then the red-hot haste to inform Pontiac of the deception. The light craft would be swung about and the strong arms of the Ottawas would soon bring the astounding news to the shore.

Ballou, standing beside Pontiac, expected some belated warrior would come running across the marsh at any minute to announce the white prisoner had escaped. But as the Wolf's canoe vanished in the darkness he was seized with a much greater fear, that the meeting between Pontiac's mouthpiece and Tamaque was about to take place. He lost all sense of time and feared that already the Wolf was learning there were two Trade Knifes, and that the genuine had yet to land at Sandusky.

The smoke and the glare of the waving torches, and the yelling of the frenzied red men was kindling a wild enthusiasm in Pontiac and he no longer gave heed to the white man. Ballou edged down the shore until he knew he was outside the zone of flickering light. The dancing savages stood out like silhouettes of so many devils, but Ballou knew he was invisible to them.

He had no trouble in locating a canoe with four paddles. He knew his friends had had ample time to skirt the Wyandotte village and fall upon the two warriors at the cabin and conduct the girl down the shore trail and well east of the camp.

By the time Tamaque landed the fugitives should have placed several miles between them and the camp. On discovering the imposition practised upon him Pontiac would throw his entire force into the woods to scour the country in all directions. Tamaque's men would give assistance, for the Trade Knife's anger would be very great. Some of the fleetest warriors would be sent down the Cuyahoga trail in an effort to draw ahead of the fugitives and waylay them in the daytime did they take that course. The girl would be unable to travel as fast as her escort.

"Unless I can find them and get them into

the canoe they can't escape," groaned Ballou. "I was a fool not to have started them for Detroit. Pontiac wouldn't be looking for that and we could have made the fort in the night."

It was too late now to shift plans and there was no time to waste in bewailing his judgment. He looked back to the landing place. The Indians were still dancing like madmen. He picked up the canoe and placed it in the water. Straightening he shot another glance at the wild throng. Now he could make out Pontiac's dark figure standing ankle deep in the water so as to be the first of those on shore to greet the Delaware.

He held a torch in one hand, which illuminated his strong profile. His blanket hung from his hips. In place of the wampum string he had given to Rickards was a necklace of bear's teeth, with a large French medal for a pendant. He presented a splendid figure of barbaric dignity as he stood there, staring toward the lights on the water. He had not yet noticed Ballou's withdrawal; and the forest-runner shivered as he pictured the tremendous rage of the leader once he learned of the bogus Knife's deception and the shame it had placed on the Three Fires.

Ballou stepped into the canoe and pushed off. The lights down the lake, heretofore in a line as several canoes moved abreast, now seemed to be drawing in to a common point. The song of the paddlers ceased and was succeeded by a terrific outcry, an explosion of hate that penetrated even to the ears of the mad dancers on the shore.

"They are killing the Wolf and his men!" screamed an Ottawa.

Pontiac drew back from the water and ordered some of his men to take canoes and reconnoiter, and to go without torches. From the lake arose a mighty diapason of savage voices, shouting the same thing over and over. It was impossible to interpret the cry, but Ballou easily guessed its meaning. He paddled rapidly for the open lake. He left the bay behind and swung south unobserved by several canoes behind him. Louder grew the shouting as the flotilla advanced up the lake. Ahead of the fleet moved a single canoe with one torch, which moved much faster than the others.

This would be the Wolf returning with the great news. Working inshore so that he might land and run for it did the torchlight betray him, or a straggler happen upon him, Ballou ceased paddling. The Wolf's canoe was now abreast of him, and the paddlers in unison shouted:

"Catch the Knife! Catch the Knife! The true Trade Knife is with Tamaque!"

Ballou bent to his work and made the light craft fairly fly over the placid waters. He knew that once the Wolf entered the bay and came within hearing of those ashore the chase would be on in terrible earnestness. Maintaining his efforts he covered several miles before nearing the shore and landing.

He was used to Indians and Indian fighting, but he could not overcome his fears when he thought of Pontiac's rage at being hoodwinked. The war-chief's pride had received a deep wound. There would be no endeavor left unmade to capture the imposter and subject him to all the hideous tortures the Ottawas were capable of inflicting. And second to the chief in fury would be the Trade Knife.

"They must have fetched the girl clear long before Pontiac's eyes were opened," Ballou repeatedly told himself, as, panting from excitement, he picked his way by sense of touch to find the Cuyahoga trail.

It seemed to him as if many hours had passed before his feet stumbled upon the narrow slot, worn deep and hard by centuries of moccasins. At the risk of discovery—for he must know the truth—he groped about and found dry moss and produced his tinder box and managed to strike a string of sparks. The tiny ball of moss flared up, and kneeling he examined the path. The surface of the path had not been disturbed.

There was a cobweb, retaining all the symmetry of the first engineer. There were the feathers of a grouse, surprized by fox or wolf, undisturbed by passing feet. And three men and a woman could not hurry along the narrow way without leaving ample signs. He crushed the little wad of moss and covered it with dead leaves at one side of the path. Then he composed himself to wait. If Nell Marks had been recaptured he could never go back and admit failure to Hance Whit. Nor would he be taken alive by Pontiac's men, or the Delawares.

He was lying with his ear to the path, and at last he heard it, or felt it, he could not tell which, a faint *thud, thud.* It was impossible to determine from which direction the hurrying feet were approaching. He drew back from the path and pulled his ax.

The steps now became audible and he could hear a runner panting.

"For God's sake don't let up! You got to keep going, gal!" It was Meekly's voice.

"Go on and leave me," gasped a choked voice.

Ballou trembled violently. So great was his reaction that it was with difficulty he managed to sound a low bird-note.

"Where be you?" snarled Meekly's voice. "Who be you?"

"Come along, Enoch! Come along! Thought you'd never come. I'm right ahead in the path. I have a canoe on the shore."

In the darkness they met. Ballou found Nell Mark's hand and pressed it warmly.

"They'll follow the trail. They'll be coming any minute," Ballou warned. "We'll take to the canoe."

"Gal's pegged out. They'll find our signs with the first light. They'll see where we quit the path for the water. We've got to swing ashore once it comes daylight," muttered Meekly.

BALLOU took the girl's hand and led the way to the lake. Meekly came next, carrying a kettle of meat he had brought from the cabin. Rickards stumbled and fell several times. The Conestoga under his breath hummed a new song in honor of his medicine. It was the Indian who first came upon the canoe once they reached the shore. Embarking they paddled east. Rickards was very quiet. He spoke no word but maneuvered so as to be next to Nell. Ballou was ahead of the girl, and after glancing up the lake and feeling relieved at beholding no lights he jerkily said to her—

"Thought you'd never come, Nell."

Meekly answered for her, explaining:

"Only one Injun on guard. Had to wait a spell to locate t'other. The Beaver found him at last, drunk's a fiddler. Must 'a' got hold of some rum before the kegs was took in. He'll be a long time waking up. How'd old Pontiac take it when he l'arned you wa'n't the real Trade Knife? Lawdy but I'd give ten pounds of powder to have seen him!"

"I wasn't there to see him. Too tired to talk, Nell?"

"Too happy," she whispered. "How's Hance Whit? Enoch said he'd been hurt."

"In the arm. He'll be all right by this time."

"I'm glad. He's been very good to me."

Ballou winced and felt jealousy eat into his heart. Then she was asking:

"And my father? Is he well?"

It was a sad task, but he told her, softening it as much as he could. He represented Marks as being shot and instantly killed while defending the cabin. She made no show of her grief although he knew she was silently weeping. The night held calm, and the stars were duplicated in the quiet water. The real test would come on the morrow when Pontiac would do his utmost to wipe out the insult fastened upon him at his own fire. Nor would Tamaque and Trade Knife be lacking in zeal. To get the girl back to the settlements would be the greatest task either of the forest-runners had ever attempted.

Neither dared to contemplate all the risks, and each doggedly determined to meet danger as it confronted him and to indulge in no useless worrying over what might happen. The Conestoga was happy. He had heaped shame on Pontiac and had counted several death coups. If death awaited him within the next mile it did not matter. He had won glory enough. Rickards sensed nothing of the past and had no thought for the future. His mind had not returned to the channels of sanity. He was content to be near the white woman with the yellow hair.

After two hours of silent weeping the girl secured control of herself and whispered:

"I am brave now, Jarvis. Nothing can ever again hurt my father. He trusted the Indians, and that makes it harder. But we won't talk about him now. What will you do next, Jarvis?"

"Depends on circumstances, Nell. Either make down the Alleghany and try to sneak into Fort Pitt; or strike across to the west branch of the Susquehanna and risk getting by Great Island village and several other devils' nests."

She did not speak for a minute, and when she did it was to ask—

"Is Hance on the Susquehanna, or at Pitt?"

He feared she felt diffident in putting the question, and the thought hurt him.

"I don't believe he's on the Susquehanna. If his arm has mended enough he'll be at Ligonier, or scouting for Colonel Bouquet. Whit isn't a man to keep idle when there's a chance for a fight."

"He's too reckless," she sighed. "He went to Bushy Run when he learned I was to go. He's reckless, but he's very brave."

"None braver," readily agreed Ballou, and the bitterness in his heart increased.

They were silent again. Another mile and the Conestoga was drawing in his paddle and making a soft hissing sound. Meekly and Ballou ceased paddling and waited for their red friend to explain his warning.

"Ahead. Canoe coming," he whispered.

It was useless to look; and, listen as they would, neither of the white men could discover the approach of a canoe. Rickards, who had dropped asleep, began snoring. The Conestoga pinched his nose between thumb and finger. Rickards stirred uneasily and would have given a louder alarm had not the girl rested a hand on his head. He became quiet. There came the sound of a paddle, softly dipping somewhere ahead.

"Can you see anything, Beaver?" whispered Ballou.

"The Beaver sees with his ears. They know we are here. They have seen nothing, but they heard the medicine-man breathe in his sleep. If they call out tell them you are the Trade Knife. That you turned back to find out why they paddle so slow."

The canoe drifted. Again they heard a paddle cautiously thrust into the water.

"They are creeping up on us," whispered the Conestoga. The canoe was gently agitated for a few moments, then careened to one side a bit.

"Who are you?" harshly called a voice from the darkness and speaking in the Delaware tongue.

"The Trade Knife. Why do you sleep? Tamaque is waiting for you," answered Ballou, changing the paddle for his rifle.

The occupants of the invisible canoe were silent for a bit, then the voice suspiciously replied:

"Tamaque knows we were away when he started. We read his tree signs and followed him. How did his medicine know we were on the lake?"

From the water and close to Ballou's left hand the Conestoga whispered:

"Keep away from them. Pick me up when I come."

And he was swimming with the ease of a beaver.

"Ask Tamaque about his medicine. Do not ask his son," coldly called out Ballou.

"Was there no warrior he could send that he must send the Trade Knife?"

"Ask Tamaque, do not ask his son," repeated Ballou.

There was no reply made to this and the white men grew nervous. They imagined they could see the bulk of a canoe approaching, only each saw it in a different direction. Then the fight opened with a war-arrow swishing into the water at one side. Meekly raised his rifle but Ballou felt the barrel against his arm and warned his friend to hold his fire.

He pressed on the girl's shoulder as a signal for her to crouch lower. Rickards resumed snoring and the sound aided the invisible enemy somewhat, for the next arrow clipped within a foot of Meekly's head. Ballou dipped his paddle and swerved the canoe to one side. Another arrow skimmed along the water, but well to the left. Rickards mumbled something in his sleep, and three arrows were discharged toward the canoe as fast as they could be released, all passing dangerously close.

"——! I won't stand no more of that!" gritted Meekly, and again he threw up his rifle.

"Don't! You'll shoot the Beaver!" warned Ballou.

Before Meekly could weigh the danger of a chance shot there was a howl of fear, followed by a gurgling cry and much splashing. Ballou sent the canoe toward the sounds, but dared not advance close for fear of being upset. The struggling of the men in the black water set the girl to trembling and aroused Rickards from his deep sleep.

"What is it?" Rickards asked, and even the excitement of the moment did not prevent Ballou and Meekly from noticing a new quality in the man's voice.

A Delaware began a shout of triumph and ceased abruptly. There was no more splashing. The fight had ended. The white men clubbed their rifles and waited.

"Speak!" snarled Meekly as a hand flirted water in his face and clutched at the side of the canoe.

"Black Beaver!" came the reply in a choked voice; and the Conestoga slowly worked his way to the end of the canoe and allowed Meekly to drag him aboard.

"There were two," he panted. "One died quick. One died very hard. The Beaver was under water a long time, with the last man believing he had won."

And he attempted to lift his voice in a shout of victory.

The paddles were snatched up and Rickards, without a word, took the Beaver's place. Until the first light of dawn the fugitives held to the east. They had food with them, but it was impossible to secure adequate rest in the canoe, and the morning would find many warriors searching the forest and the lake. Meekly and Ballou stared apprehensively at the dark shore line. To remain afloat was impossible. To go ashore was only a bit less hazardous. It was the Conestoga who decided for them. He pointed to a tiny islet of rocks. The steep sides were some fifteen feet above the water. A small spruce and a fringe of grass growing on top were evidences of soil, and for the latter there must be a depression. The Indian said:

"The brave man takes the brave path. Let the Beaver's friends hide where all may see, for then few will look. Let the Beaver leave you there and take the canoe ashore. It is a little place. One look will tell Ottawa and Leni-lenape that no canoe is there. The Beaver, when alone, will not be caught. Empty the meat on the ground and fill the kettle with water. When it is safe and the Beaver does not come let the white men take the woman to Presqu' Isle. Do not wait for the Beaver; he will follow and find his friends."

"Let's have a look at the place, Jarvis," growled Meekly. "Looks to be mighty slim hiding, but it may answer. One thing's sure, it'll cost 'em a heap of lives to drive us out."

The canoe was swiftly driven to the east side of the rocks and Ballou scrambled up the smooth surface and found a larger depression than he had expected. It was in the soil of this that the spruce had taken root.

"If we don't have to stay here too long it ain't so bad," he called down from the lip of the rock. "They might starve us out, but they could never get at us in any other way. So long as our powder and bullets last not a canoe can get within arrow range except at night."

"Be cunning in getting the woman up. Hitch belts together to pull up the meat," said the Conestoga.

Ballou worked down a few feet and, with Meekly assisting her, Nell Marks had no difficulty in gaining the hollow. Rickards was clumsy and presented a greater problem than did the girl. Meekly had him remove his tattered boots so as not to leave any signs. The belts were next lowered and secured to the kettle, and, with Meekly steadying it to prevent its contents from spilling, food and fugitives were soon in the hollow. The Beaver paddled down the lake for an eighth of a mile and then cut in to shore.

Ballou announced his intention of standing the first watch and induced the girl to lie down on the blankets and try to sleep. Meekly was asleep inside of sixty seconds, his long rifle still clutched in one hand. Rickards reclined on his back and stared up at the gray sky, his face drawn and greatly puzzled. Ballou covered his head with dead grass and cautiously crawled to the rim of the hollow and peered up the lake. No canoes were in sight. Neither did the shoreline display any sign of life. The fires in the east now painted the skyline red, and the sun, as if suddenly thrust upward by a giant hand, appeared and laid down a crimson path over the placid waters.

TWO hours elapsed before anything attracted Ballou's attention. Without any warning a painted face showed through the bushes fringing the shore. For a while Ballou stared as if fascinated. The lone scout glanced up and down the lake and then dropped on all fours and lowered his head. Up jerked the head and the warrior was like some wild animal, suspecting danger. With head tilted he remained motionless for a minute; then, reassured, bowed to drink. He had sucked in a mouthful when some sense for a second time warned him of danger.

He started to lift his head, but he was too late. A brawny arm shot through the cover and a muscular hand had seized the man by the neck and was pressing the feather-decked head under water. The terrible tragedy was enacted before Ballou's startled gaze with scarcely a sound. There was some spasmodic struggling but no outcry; and after a few minutes the warrior remained quiescent, his head under water. The arm of his executioner vanished. Ballou shivered although the sun now was pouring its warmth down on the rocks. The forest-ranger felt helpless as he gazed on the pale face of the girl. He knew the scouts must have traveled along the shore path all night and were abreast, or beyond, the islet by this time.

Some lake birds flew low over the hiding place and made much noise in the grass along the shore. The warmth of the pelting rays made Ballou feel drowsy. He ventured to close his eyes for a moment and must have nodded for a few minutes for when he next looked out on the water he was dismayed to behold ten canoes within musket shot of the rocks. The water birds flew up as the little fleet swung in toward the shore. In the foremost canoe kneeled the Trade Knife, holding his musket in readiness, while his Delaware brothers paddled slowly. So far as Ballou could observe there were only Delawares in the party.

The rearmost canoe held a straight course to the rocks and passed outside of them. Ballou held his breath and prayed that none of his sleeping companions would give an alarm. The canoe was hidden from his range of vision but he knew it was close to the rocks and that keen eyes were noting the steep sides and lack of verdure. Then it passed on and rounded the east side to come into view of the other canoes.

"The overturned canoe belonged to the Leni-lenape," called out the Trade Knife. "There was no storm to make it tip over. Some of the Leni-lenape were in it. What tipped it over, my brothers?"

"The white men and the red man ran away from Pontiac's camp before we reached it," answered a guttural voice. "Some of them came down the lake and met our brothers on the water and stuck axes in their heads, or they caught them sleeping on the shore and killed them and pushed the canoe into the water to make us think they are on the lake. Whatever way it was we know they are ahead of us. Let us paddle fast and overtake them."

"Our brother speaks with a wise tongue," cried the Trade Knife. "But Pontiac says the white man, who wore my face, was at his side when our canoes came up the lake. He believes that man only got away in a canoe. One Ottawa canoe is missing from the big camp. He believes the others ran away with the white woman and took to the woods. The canoe would travel only at night. Look sharp for the spot where it landed."

"Ho!" shouted a man in the canoe nearest the shore; and he caught up his bow and placed an arrow on the cord.

All eyes turned toward the shore and several now discovered the object which had startled the warrior—the back of a warrior, naked to the breech-clout and having the head under water.

The Knife gave a sharp yelp and told his paddlers to set him ashore. The other canoes pressed after him, but more slowly and with the occupants ready to break up a surprize attack. The Knife was the first to land. He ran to the dead warrior and after a brief examination cried out:

"This is one of Pontiac's Ottawa scouts. This man was killed by having his head held under water. He was killed since the sun came up. Let one man stay in each canoe and paddle along the shore for a short distance. Let the others follow me. Let my canoe stay here by the dead man."

The Delawares and the Trade Knife vanished into the growth. The canoes proceeded slowly along the shore and around a wooded point. The girl changed her position, Meekly yawned and opened his eyes, and, catching Ballou's warning gaze checked the impulse to stretch his limbs. Rickards continued sleeping.

"Indians been all around us," whispered Ballou. "They don't suspect we're here. The Trade Knife just landed where the Beaver killed an Ottawa scout who was getting a drink."

"Such doings!" gasped Meekly.

He lost no time in covering his bald head with grass and in squirming up beside his friend. A loud shout around the point announced the discovery of the canoe hidden by the Beaver.

"They think we all landed and that one man crept up the shore and did for the Ottawa," whispered Ballou.

A yell, followed by the report of a rifle shot, shattered the quiet of the woods. The girl opened her eyes and stared in terror at the white men, then remembered as Ballou turned his face and smiled reassuringly. There came the ancient scalp-cry of the Conestogas and a chorus of frantic howls as the pack gave chase.

"——! That Beaver has bagged another!" exclaimed Meekly in deep admiration. "And he's leading 'em inland so's we can have a chance to git out!"

The occasional shouts of defiance and the vengeful cries of the pursuers were now caught up by other voices as the Ottawas along the shore trail made haste to be in at the killing. The clamor rapidly receded as the chase led inland.

Rickards opened his eyes and muttered—
"They're burning the cabin!"

Then he sat up and stared distrustfully about him. He continued silent as he struggled to revive other memories. He repeatedly glanced out on the lake as if the broad expanse of water worried him. Meekly slipped off his hunting shirt and kicked off his moccasins. In response to Ballou's unvoiced question he whispered:

"Shore's clear of the varmints. I'm going to play a game on them so's we can dig out. Keep your traps shet and keep your heads down."

Before Ballou could learn more of his plan Meekly had gently slipped down the north side of the rock into the water. With a few strong strokes he rounded the west side of the islet and disappeared. When the bald head next showed he was half way between the rocks and the shore. The head remained in sight only long enough for the swimmer to refill his lungs; then he was swimming under water again. Ballou saw him emerge and crawl ashore.

"Good ——! Is he crazy?" muttered Ballou as his friend passed the dead man and the Trade Knife's canoe and plunged into the growth.

Rickards crawled up to the edge of the rocks and stared blankly at the water and the forest, then gave a little clicking sound with his teeth, like a man who suffers from a chill, and slid back beside the girl. Nell patted his hands and talked softly to him. He became more quiet, but he would not speak.

The pursuit was now far inland, and only murmurs of it reached Ballou's ears as the pack intermittently raised the hunting-call. He heard the muffled reports of several guns and was positive one of them was a rifle. It seemed a long time before Meekly reappeared. He startled Ballou by boldly emerging from the bushes and stepping into the Knife's canoe. Without any pretense at stealth he swiftly paddled to the north side of the rocks and bruskly called out—

"Send down the gal and Rickards, then the kettle of meat."

"You're mad, Enoch. Take the canoe back and swim out to us. We must wait till night. They may return any time. They'd overtake us in their canoes."

"Let 'em come back and hoot to soften their feelings. I've smashed all their canoes. No canoes in sight up the lake. We've got a clear trail. We can sneak ashore tonight, or stay on the water. We've got to make Presqu' Isle ahead of them critters, or the road will be blocked and we'll be goners."

"Oh, anything to be doing something!" pleaded the girl.

Now that Ballou knew the canoes were destroyed he found Meekly's plan as feasible as anything he could offer; and he gave a hand to the girl and helped her down the rock until Meekly could receive her in his arms. Rickards went next and sensed enough of the situation to seize a paddle and be ready to aid in their flight. The kettle of meat, the blankets and weapons, were all stowed away, and Ballou took his position in the bow. Not a word was spoken for five miles of rapid progress, then Meekly chuckled and remarked—

"Wonder what the Trade Knife will say when he finds his birches ripped to pieces!"

Ballou suggested that they take turns in resting. Nell Marks insisted that she contribute her strength and quickly proved the worth of a pioneer woman's powers of endurance. Most fortunate for the fugitives was the state of the weather, which continued calm. They were keeping well out from shore so as to steer as straight a course as possible for the point some twenty miles west of the Cuyahoga. At midday each took his turn in eating from the kettle.

Toward dusk they turned north and paddled until satisfied no spying eyes on shore could perceive them. Then they reversed their course and under cover of darkness crept in to find a hiding place while they enjoyed a few hours of sleep. Ballou was especially in need of rest as he had had no sleep for thirty-six hours.

THEY landed on a patch of sand at the head of the point and spread their blankets. Meekly took the watch, it being agreed the journey should be resumed after four hours. Nothing disturbed them, and much refreshed they quietly embarked and struck off for the Cuyahoga. Less than twenty miles would take them to the mouth of the river, but it was decided not to enter as they knew it to be one of the great danger spots of their journey. Yet the river meant something besides peril to Ballou and Meekly, for they were wondering what had happened to the Conestoga. Would he strike back to the islet?

They did not believe it. If he believed his friends were still there he would endeavor to lead the enemy in another direction. And he had said he would follow and overtake them at Presqu' Isle. Was he now racing for his life along the trail that led through the swamp and to the river? If not for the girl they would have gone to meet him. At times they lamented him as one dead, then as one escaping because of his superior cunning.

They passed the mouth of the river as the east began to show gray. The sky was slightly overcast and it was still quite dark when they landed two miles east of the river and pulled the canoe into a thick growth at the water's edge.

Rickards continued very quiet and gave them no trouble. There was ever the questioning, puzzled expression on his rugged face. He was like one who had awakened in an entirely new environment and could not make life seem real. Nell Marks sensed the terrible conflict going on in his troubled soul and often placed a hand on his to soothe him. He seemed to know her, for he called her by name several times.

The girl realized the physical hardships her friends had undergone, and she insisted they sleep while she remained on guard, declaring that she could sleep in the canoe. As their strength was her strength they both surrendered, and the sun was nearly overhead when they next opened their eyes.

Concealing their alarm, for they had intended to be afloat after three or four hours of sleep, Meekly advised they scout the shore and toward the Cuyahoga. Ballou started for the river while his friend scouted up the shore. Ballou found no signs of Indians east of the river and pressed forward to see if any camp had been pitched at the stream. The woods thinned out at last and afforded him a glimpse of the low banks, He rejoiced to find no fires or smoke, and would have turned back to inform his friends the enemy had not yet reached the river had not a faint yell held him in his tracks.

From behind a tree he watched the opening where he and his friends had stopped on the westward journey. The cry was not repeated and he was trying to make himself believe it was the voice of some animal when he glimpsed a furtive figure running along the path on the west side of the river. Where the growth was not too thick the runner dodged from tree to tree, giving the impression he was being closely followed and feared an arrow or a bullet. The man took the river without any hesitation and gained the eastern shore. Now Ballou knew the runner to be Black Beaver and he endeavored to secure his attention by waving his hand.

He was driven to cover again as the path beyond the stream suddenly became filled with Indians. They came so fast and were so thickly crowded together that it was impossible to count them, but Ballou estimated them to be several score in number. The Conestoga had reached cover before they could sight him, and for a minute their trailers scurried up and down the bank. A sharp yelp announced the finding of the spot where he had taken to water. They forded the stream in a rush, Ottawas and Delawares, largely.

Beaver burst through the timber within a rod of Ballou and came to a halt.

"Go away!" he softly cried. "The Leni-lenape chase only the Conestoga. Go away! Save the white woman. Be very cunning."

Before Ballou could speak his red friend had turned to the south and was running swiftly parallel to the river. Although the cover was excellent he was soon discovered, and in a yelping chorus the savages shifted their course to head him off. He led them far before Ballou was back with his friends.

"Ho! They say a brave man is about to die!" the Beaver cried, at last turning at bay. "Yo-hah! They say the Leni-lenape are still women and are afraid of a brave man. They say the last of the Conestogas scalped four Leni-lenape near the river. They say the Conestoga killed the Rat and a Fox warrior. They say the Conestoga killed one of the guards who watched over the white woman. Ho! ho! They say he killed the Leni-lenape at the Great Island village. Who will come and help the last of the Conestogas to die? His medicine, the Ga-go-sa, says he will die very hard and will need much help!"

He had halted with his back to a tree. As he finished speaking he threw up his rifle and shot a tall warrior off his feet, and then smashed the barrel from the stock to use as a club. With a scream of rage they attacked, the Trade Knife urging them on from the rear. The Beaver fought well and long, dodging from tree to tree, yet never attempting direct flight. He broke a skull

with the heavy rifle barrel and hideously spoiled a painted face with a back-hand swing of the same weapon. The Knife endeavored to shoot him and fired twice and was derisively addressed by the Conestoga. They repeatedly believed they had him surrounded, and he would break through the circle at its weakest point.

"Yo-hah! It would be a good fight if the Beaver did not have to fight alone!" he taunted.

He suddenly wheeled and threw his ax and killed an Ottawa creeping up behind him. He dropped on his face and escaped a Delaware ax that stuck in a tree behind him. Wrenching the weapon loose he brained its owner, who rashly ran in to grapple him. Two arrows pierced his chest and a third dangled from his thigh. He felt his strength failing and took his last stand with his back to a chestnut tree and commenced his death-song.

"Kill him! Kill him! Rum and red cloth to the man who takes his scalp!" shrieked the Trade Knife, beside himself with rage as he remembered how many warriors the Conestoga had accounted for since the chase began.

Then they closed in on him and he met them with flashing eyes and a taunt on his lips. He went down with many piling on top of him. And when the struggling mass had subsided and the warriors crawled to their feet to nurse their wounds two of the Ottawas remained beside their slayer. They had paid dear for his scalp, and a Delaware spat blood and gasped—

"He was a very brave man!"

"This place has a very bad medicine. We go back to Pontiac. We have too many dead men to tell him about," panted an Ottawa. And urge them as he would the Trade Knife could induce none beside his Delawares to continue the search for the white men and the woman.

Ballou stole into the hiding place and whispered:

"We must go. Rickards, take the blankets and the meat to the canoe. Move quietly."

"What is it? We've heard nothing," murmured Nell Marks.

"The savages have reached the river. They will be scouting this way. Go to the canoe."

"The lake's clear," said Meekly. "What's the rumpus you're keeping from the gal?"

Nell was standing by the canoe and Ballou whispered:

"Black Beaver has let himself be killed to give us this chance. I heard his shouting after he had led them to the south. And I couldn't help him without killing you all!"

They embarked and paddled out of musket-shot and then struck for Presqu' Isle. The sky became overcast and it began to rain. So long as the wind did not blow the rain was very welcome.

IT RAINED throughout the greater part of their journey to Presqu' Isle and the clouds were hanging low and threatening when they carried their belongings up the tongue of land where formerly had stood the fort. Nell Marks had borne up well under the fatigues of the hard journey and was eager to press on and get away from the lake. Ballou and Meekly knew all must rest if they were to endure until reaching Fort Pitt. They had decided it would be wiser to risk the canoe trip down the Alleghany than to hazard the portage to the Susquehanna.

Not once since Ballou had alarmed them in the camp near the Cuyahoga had they seen any sign of an enemy. Meekly was inclined to think the pursuit was abandoned, but Ballou persisted it would be only a short time before the Leni-lenape would arrive at Presqu' Isle. The Ottawas might turn back, but never the Trade Knife and his followers. Whatever chances Pontiac ever had had of inducing Tamaque to participate in a grand assault on Fort Detroit were now lost; for Tamaque had found the Rat dead, the white woman gone, and the impostors escaped from the big camp.

Rickards expressed no opinion as to the nearness of danger. He was striving to fill in the hiatus between the Forbes road fight and this strange awakening on Lake Erie. He appeared to be afraid, or ashamed, to ask questions, and none of the three deemed it wise to enlighten him so long as he proved to be tractable.

The men soon secured dry wood from the ruins of the stockade and built a fire. Blankets and garments were dried out. Meekly shot some squirrels with the Conestoga's bow and arrows. Ballou risked a shot and bagged a deer. The kettle was set to boiling and filled with meat. While they ate, more meat was cooked. The sun broke through the clouds as if to encourage them. Meekly for the twentieth time went out on the point

and looked up the lake. This time he returned on the run, crying:

"Put out the fire and pick up your feet. There are canoes coming down the lake. Thank the Lawd we've got two canoes hid at Le Bœuf!"

They quickly made their belongings into packs, including the Conestoga's blanket and wooden mask. Rickards, being powerful of frame, carried the big kettle in addition to the burden on his shoulders. Meekly held back to cover the rear. Ballou, with Nell Marks at his side, walked down the Le Bœuf road and marveled at his success in entering Pontiac's camp and stealing a prisoner from it. Meekly smiled grimly as he watched them walking side by side and talking earnestly. He knew it was the first time since the girl's capture that the two had had the privilege of privacy.

Cramped and stiffened by the long hours in the canoe the few miles to Le Bœuf would have afforded a welcome change to the girl if not for a mishap. They were following the road through a long stretch of swamp and she was talking earnestly to Ballou and not watching her footing. She stepped into a hole and wrenched her ankle. She tried to make light of it but soon grew white of face and began to weep bitterly.

"I wouldn't mind the hurt," she sobbed, "if I could only walk. But I'm holding you back."

Meekly ran up and told her to cling to his and Ballou's shoulders, but this arrangement did not permit them to make much headway. Rickards, who had looked back in alarm on hearing the girl's sobs, finally grasped the situation. Setting down the kettle he ran back and picked the girl up in his arms and strode ahead. Meekly took the kettle and in this fashion they hurried along for a mile before Rickards halted and gently lowered the girl to the ground.

"I'll take her for a spell," offered Meekly.

But Rickards would not hear to this and emphatically cried:

"No! No! No!"

The girl began lamenting that she should be a nuisance and declared she would not hold them back any longer.

"That'll do, Nell," sternly interrupted Ballou. "We made this trip just to snake you out of Pontiac's clutches. By God's help we'll finish the job, or die trying. Can you carry her any farther, Rickards?"

For an answer he picked her up, only this time he threw her over his shoulder and carried her more easily and for a much greater distance. With frequent halts, between swiftly covered intervals, they finally arrived at the ruins of Le Bœuf.

While Meekly was securing the canoes, hidden on the up trip, Ballou removed the girl's moccasin and bathed the swollen ankle and bandaged it tightly with a strip torn from his hunting shirt. Once afloat the girl suffered but little as she rested on a couch of blankets. Meekly went with her, although he privately signaled for Ballou to be the one. Ballou and Rickards brought up the rear. They had no way of determining how long it would take the canoes seen on the lake to arrive at Presqu' Isle, for they did not know how much time had been lost on the Le Bœuf road.

Meekly insisted that once the warriors discovered the fresh fire they would press the pursuit hotly. The road from Presqu' Isle to Fort Pitt was considerably shorter than the water route, and though the Indians followed afoot they would continue to be a menace until the fugitives were behind the Fort Pitt stockade. The night threatened rain and was black rather than merely dark. As no satisfactory progress could be made, and as there was great danger of punching a hole in a canoe, they landed, made a dark camp, and trusted to luck. The kettle furnished them their supper, and, dividing the watches, Meekly and Ballou secured a few hours of sleep before it grew light enough to resume their flight.

THEY saw no signs of Indians until they reached Venango and paused to replenish their kettle. Then in the northeast they discovered a thin streak of smoke. It was too far distant to be a menace, Meekly decided. Ballou attempted to spare the girl any glimpse of the ruins, but she sadly told him:

"You forget; I have seen it all and close by. They camped here when they brought me up the river. It was very terrible."

Throughout the journey Rickards had remained much the same. He was given to brooding and seldom spoke. His companions doubted if he recalled anything between the fight in the Forbes road and his awakening on the lake. That he remembered something prior to his being frightened by the snake was evident; for when

Ballou once mentioned the fight at the Byerly cabin, Rickards shuddered and muttered—

"Fire."

The girl's influence over him continued to be strong and she could usually quiet him by patting his hand. He had moments of great nervousness and once or twice the men feared he might break away from them. It was the girl who dissuaded him from throwing away Pontiac's wampum. Her ankle had improved none during the trip to Venango and they were bound to follow the river in its winding course through an Indian-infested country.

They were out of meat before reaching Venango, and Ballou was unsuccessful when he tried for small game with the bow and arrows. In desperation Meekly ranged far from the camp and was gone so long his companions were greatly worried. But when he returned he brought the butchered carcass of a deer. It was near night when he returned and they had lost a day. Hiding the fire as best they could they broiled and boiled much of the venison.

They were placing the meat on strips of bark to cool when Rickards startled them by abruptly announcing—

"We're bein' chased mighty close."

When questioned he remained silent. Even the girl could not induce him to give any reason for his ominous words.

"He ain't crazy now," Meekly whispered to Ballou. "Just a case of not remembering what happened while he was crazy. So I don't take any stock in his medicine. If we was being chased we'd see a smoke sometime; for Injuns have to cook meat and eat as well as we. Yet if the gal was able to hoof it I'd say to hide the canoes and take to the road, traveling nights and sleeping days. At every dinged bend of the river I'll be expecting to see a Injun village just ahead."

"She can't walk. Go to sleep. It's my watch."

While they were rolling their blankets in the morning Rickards took out the knife he had taken from Pontiac's girdle and examined its edge with his thumb.

"We're in for a fight mighty soon," he announced.

"You ain't got any call to say that, Rickards. What do you mean?" demanded Meekly, speaking harshly to conceal a sudden thrill of fear.

Rickards muttered under his breath but would vouchsafe no explanation. Ballou cheerfully suggested—

"The best way to dodge a fight is to get afloat and eat our meat in the canoes."

A musket banged up the creek and a bullet glanced from the side of the big kettle and screeched as it ricocheted. Rickards swept up the girl in his arms and bolted down the river bank. Meekly and Ballou took to trees and glared about in search of the enemy. They were below the mouth of French creek and on the west bank of the Alleghany with the ruins of the fort behind them.

"This seems to be the end," muttered Ballou. "They made mighty fast time down the creek. Hi, Rickards! Put the girl in the canoe and paddle down stream, —— bent!"

Instead of obeying Rickards reappeared, the long knife in his hand and a ferocious light showing in his eyes. The men called on him to go back and take the girl away while they held the river. He gave no heed but swung to one side and made for the mouth of the creek.

"Crazy's a loon!" groaned Meekly. "Jarvis, git the gal afloat and hustle along."

"No, Enoch, you must take her."

"——! You're the man she wants——"

"If you'd save her from the Indians, take her down the river," snarled Ballou. "I'll follow through the woods."

An outburst of triumphant howls filled the woods up the creek. Rickards threw back his head and laughed with terrible gusto. The howling ceased.

"I swear it, man! I won't budge till you and Nell are paddling downstream," cried Ballou.

The howling was renewed and grew louder as the hidden savages advanced down the creek.

"You poor fool!" passionately upbraided Meekly. "If it wa'n't for the gal I'd see you in —— before I'd turn and run. I'll leave Rickards' new musket and some meat in the canoe. Git him back to go with you."

With that he began retreating to the river bank and was speedily driven to a tree by a ragged volley of musket shots. One warrior, too curious, thrust his head into view for a moment and caught Meekly's bullet in the forehead.

Rickards had halted and seemed uncertain as to what he would do next. He had not sought cover and yet neither bullets nor

arrows were fired at him. He held Pontiac's knife half raised while his left hand toyed with the wampum-string. He paid no attention to Ballou's repeated cries for him to return.

"Don't wait too long, Jarvis," begged Meekly after he had slipped down the bank to where the girl was waiting in a canoe. "Mistress Nell says for you to come now."

Ballou could hear her frantically remonstrating as Meekly seized a paddle and started down the river, hugging the west bank.

"Rickards, the white woman has gone! Come back here! We must follow her," cried Ballou.

But Rickards by this time had heard the Indians as they advanced through the growth and he slowly walked forward to meet them. The voice of the Trade Knife rang out:

"One gun is empty. One man takes the woman away. One rush and we'll have them all."

The Indians seemed loath to risk a charge; and the Knife furiously rebuked them:

"Shall it be told in the white settlements that the Leni-lenape are women in petticoats?"

"There is the man who wears Pontiac's wampum. He has a long knife. He is looking for a fight. No man can hurt him," answered a warrior.

"Then take him alive! He's slow and clumsy. The other men wear no wampum," yelled the Knife.

Rickards peered sharply toward the cover and again tested the edge of his knife. He was waiting for the Indians to show themselves and was indifferent to their stealthy movements as they crawled closer to him. Ballou frantically shouted warnings and begged him to fall back. A tall warrior leaped from cover to seize Rickards around the neck and dropped dead from Ballou's small bullet.

"His gun is empty! At him!" shrieked the Knife, jumping into view.

But instead of obeying six warriors attempted to wrest the knife from Rickards' hand, and the Knife had no stomach for attacking the white man alone. The Knife leaped behind a tree as Ballou reloaded. The renegade cursed his followers in French, but the Delawares had no thought except the capture of the *manitos'* child. The struggle was terrific. Rickards kept his feet because of the pressure from all sides. Two men had secured grips on his knife-arm, yet it lunged forward, drew back, and lunged forward again. And with each mighty effort Rickards grunted heavily.

At each forward plunge of the keen blade a warrior screamed and fell. Then Rickards was standing alone and staring around with blood-shot eyes in search of more of the enemy. Of the six men who had endeavored to capture him, only one survived, and he was painfully dragging himself behind a tree. Screaming like a woods-cat the Trade Knife yelled:

"His wampum doesn't save him on the Alleghany! His medicine can't stop this."

He hurled his French ax and Rickards dropped on his knees and fell on his side, done for all time with the hazard of safeguarding the Pennsylvania frontier.

With a groan Ballou finished reloading and tried to shoot the Knife, but the fellow kept well covered. One of the Delawares, however, showed himself to stare dumfounded at the fate of the *manitos'* child. Ballou shot him through the head and turned and ran to the river and leaped into the canoe and pushed off. He heard the Trade Knife scream and turned as the renegade and one warrior reached the edge of the river. The range was so short that even with the musket he could not miss. He lined the Knife, who promptly yanked his companion in front of him. The heavy ball smashed the savage's shoulder, and the Knife darted up the bank.

Ballou plied the paddle until around a bend. Then, at the risk of being shot from the shore, he took time to load his rifle. With an occasional backward glance he strove his utmost to come in sight of Meekly and the girl. He rounded several bends and was beginning to believe they had abandoned their canoe to hide in the woods when his attention was drawn to an immediate danger. While sweeping around a bend he glanced back and beheld one man paddling after him. There was no mistaking the striped face. Deserted by his superstitious followers the Trade Knife was coming alone to finish the fight. Ballou passed from the Knife's sight and decided to settle the matter and have done with being pursued.

A short distance ahead the river turned sharply to the east, and beyond this bend the fight would be finished. As he was beginning the turn the renegade came in sight as evidenced by a musket shot.

Ballou glanced back to gage the distance and the next moment was up to his neck in the river with his canoe hung up on a snag.

For a few moments he was confused and needs must pause to sweep back his long hair and wipe the water from his eyes. With a shout the Knife drove his canoe toward him and hurled his ax. The whirling blade grazed Ballou's shoulder. Ballou drew and threw his own ax. To escape it the Knife flung himself violently to one side, and his birch capsized. With an inarticulate roar Ballou wallowed forward and, as the Knife's head bobbed to the surface, he caught the long braided scalp-lock. For a second they stared at each other, for each must get a knife clear before he would be armed. Their faces, striped in the same pattern, looked much alike.

"At last!" panted the Knife, whipping out his blade and lunging.

Ballou's knife caught the thrust and for a moment the two weapons were locked, hilt to hilt. To maintain his balance Ballou had released his hold on the scalp-lock. The Knife yanked his blade clear and took a step backward and, dexterously shifting his grip, caught the weapon by the tip and threw it. At the same moment Ballou ducked and forged ahead. He felt a red hot seam rip along his scalp, and then his free hand clutched the renegade's neck and they both went down.

For nearly a minute the surface of the stream was violently disturbed with now a leg showing, and now an arm. Then the tumult subsided and one man arose and wiped the blood and water from his face. Thrusting the knife into his belt he staggered inshore until he could catch hold of the overhanging boughs.

He worked his way a short distance downstream to where the Trade Knife's canoe had lodged in some bushes, and after resting a while he managed to right it and drag himself into it. Without a paddle he could only submit to the whims of the current. It had been a long trail and a red trail, and the end was not yet.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAN WHO KNEW HOW

CAPTAIN SIMEON ECUYER, commander at Fort Pitt, called a sentry's attention to something floating down the Alleghany.

"It's a bit of drift, cap'n," said the sentinel. "River must be rising a trifle."

"It's an empty canoe," corrected Enoch Meekly, who was lounging near.

His face showed new lines of mental suffering, for the passing days had failed to bring any news of Jarvis Ballou.

"I believe you are right, Enoch," said Ecuyer. "You found no signs this morning?"

"Not a Wyandotte, Mingo, Shawnee, or Delaware within miles of us. All cleared out," sighed Meekly. "When the express from Detroit come through with that string of wampum Rickards wore I knew the Injuns was moving off in a body to raise some new deviltry. And I knew poor Ballou had been killed or captured."

"There was no signs of him found near your friend Rickards," the commander reminded him in an effort to comfort the moody forest-runner.

"They'd never touch Rickards. He was a child of the *manitos* to them. They didn't take his hair, even. But, dead or alive, they took Ballou back to Pontiac. Well, that's all finished. You can feel sartain, cap'n, that the red ——s have cleared out to strike a strong blow, and they didn't go north to help old Pontiac, either."

"Then Colonel Bouquet is on the way here and they've gone to cut him off," mused Ecuyer. "He can't possibly get through without a fight. I must start an express to him."

He paused and glanced at Meekly's somber face expectantly.

"Yes. Course I'll go. But it'll seem derned queer running the forest alone."

"I will ask for volunteers and you can take your pick," quickly offered Ecuyer.

Meekly shook his head.

"Thanky, cap'n, but after you've got used to one man's fighting ways at my time of life you don't hanker to learn the ways of a new man, no matter how keen he may be. I'll go it alone. Git your writing ready. The colonel ain't got 'nough men to make a big fight, yet he must fight. Poor Jarvis was telling me on our trip up the Susquehanna that the colonel would pull through even if he hasn't more'n five hundred men. But Jarvis took a big liking to him and didn't stop to think a man can't do sartain things, no matter how keen and brave he is. Braddock lost more men killed then Bouquet has this minute under

arms. I don't see much chance for him."

"Don't let any of the men hear that kind of talk. You're not a cheerful fellow, Enoch."

"And I never will be. ——! To think I skun out and left him to hold the river—him and poor crazy Rickards! I'm 'shamed every time I see my face in a pool of water."

"You're unjust to yourself. It was your duty to bring Mistress Marks here, and you did it. Never was the like done before! Rescued her right under Pontiac's nose and from his big war-camp! The men talk about nothing else, and won't for a year."

"It was poor Jarvis who planned the whole business—not me," groaned Enoch. "Poor lad! And him with his high hopes. Now his hair's in some Injun's scalp-smoke."

"Cap'n, something seems to be moving in that canoe!" excitedly called out the sentinel.

Ecuyer and the downcast Meekly switched their gaze up-river.

"There is a motion!" exclaimed Ecuyer. "But I can't make out just what."

Meekly shaded his eyes for a few moments, then muttered.

"Man in the canoe. Can't see only the motion of his arm as he tried to steer with a bough. Anyway, it ain't a paddle he's using."

"It must be another express from Detroit! God give the fort hasn't fallen!"

He called out to a sergeant to lead a squad of men up the river bank to investigate. Meekly announced—

"I'll jog along with 'em."

The garrison of the fort numbered some three hundred and thirty men, including backwoodsmen, who had sought shelter in the stockade with their families, and those traders who had managed to escape from the Indian towns when the war broke out.

Despite Ecuyer's repeated assertion that he could hold the place against a thousand warriors Meekly was pessimistic as he followed the squad of soldiers across the clearing. Not only had the woods been leveled for a considerable distance but also all cabins outside the ramparts. Meekly knew the presence of a hundred women and twice as many children inside the stockade called for much provision, and that unless Bouquet got through the fort must fall. Already small-pox was adding to the garrison's troubles and the hospital improvised under the draw-bridge was crowded.

Ordinarily it would have been death to venture near the river outside the ramparts as the Indians had dug themselves in along the banks of both the Monongahela and the Alleghany close to the fort and were ready to fire at every head. But now this menace did not exist, and the sergeant boldly led the way up the bank and was the first to secure a good view of the bobbing canoe.

"Lawd!" he yelled. "Head looks like a ——! Chest like a white man's!"

The man in the canoe discovered the group and waved the evergreen bough he had been using for paddle and rudder, and turned his course inshore. With a loud yell Meekly plunged into the water and waded and swam toward midstream. The bough was wielded more effectually and the canoe escaped from the grip of the current and shot alongside the swimmer.

"Thank God! Thank God, lad!" choked Meekly as he lightly rested a hand on the side of the canoe and stared joyfully at the uncouth figure.

"Back to the shore, Enoch," cried Ballou, reaching down and patting the bald head. "Had rather a hard time. Lost my rifle, paddles, blankets, and ax. Hard to kill game with a knife."

Enoch swam inshore until he found footing. Standing waist deep he remarked—

"That ain't the canoe I left for you."

"The Trade Knife's. Was his. I killed him."

"Glory be! That's vastly good hearing!"

"Poor Rickards was done for."

"Know it. Express found and buried him."

"The Knife killed him. Indians tried to take him prisoner, but wouldn't hurt him. Rickards made a rare score before he died. Took a lot of them with him. And I couldn't save him. I'll never feel right about that."

"I got Nell through all right."

"Your being here told me that. She's all right?"

"Fine. Nursing small-pox folks. Fort's full of it. Tried to stop her, but she would do it."

"That would be Nell Marks' way," softly said Ballou.

He drove the canoe up to the bank. Meekly scrambled ashore and made his

friend known to the soldiers, and the two walked behind the squad back to the fort.

"Wonderful woman!" said Ballou.

Then before Meekly could enthusiastically indorse the tribute he was asking:

"What's the matter with the Indians? Haven't seen any signs for the last few days. Expected to have a hard time making the last few miles. Nary a red. Not even a smoke."

"All gone away. Gone to head off Bouquet at Turtle Creek, or some such place. I just told Cap'n Ecuyer I'd go express to Bouquet."

"Aye?" and Ballou's gaze became eager. "Then I'll eat and rest a bit and go up the Forbes road with you. I told Colonel Bouquet in Carlisle that if I was alive I'd join him on the march here."

"Hooray for work! Nothing like real doings to make a man feel he's got a right to live. We'll outfit you with a good rifle and an ax. And you need a shirt most desp'rate."

Ballou was immediately presented to Captain Ecuyer, who furnished him with arms and clothing. After he had bathed in the river and shifted to clean leggings and hunting-shirt Meekly timidly insisted:

"Jarvis, it's best you don't see Nell. She ain't caught the sickness yet, but she may be coming down with it any day. While you was washing at the river stockade I spoke to her through the winder and said as how you'd come back from the dead. Lawdy! If ever pretty eyes filled with tears! She says you mustn't try to see her. 'Fraid you'll catch it."

"I suppose that's best," muttered Ballou, thereby surprizing and delighting his friend.

He impressed Meekly as being very weary although he had not fared hard for one used to forest-running and taking long trips in a canoe. After receiving a blanket he withdrew to the edge of the forest, where the chatter of the women and the play of the children would not disturb him, and went to sleep. The bullock-guard came in and all but trampled on him. The scouts went and came, and the children, grown bolder, escaped from their parents and romped close to him. And he slept on. It was late at night when he awoke.

Meekly was sitting by his side, patiently waiting. In his lap he had a platter of meat and coarse bread, and was holding a pewter dish of rum in his hand. Ballou devoured the food and drank the rum and then sank back and murmured:

"Get some rest, old friend. We must be early afoot."

ON THE run again, and running furtively, as they had when carrying the news to Bouquet of the fall of the three forts, the forest-runners entered the rough country near the head of Turtle Creek. From Fort Pitt to the broken land they had followed a trail left by a large number of Indians. When they entered a long ravine they were trotting in the footsteps of a red host.

The ravine was an excellent place for destroying an army could the victims be caught between the high and craggy hills. The Indians recently passing through the defile had made no effort to cover their trail but were pressing on swiftly as if sure of their mission. They believed they were advancing to repeat the success over Braddock. This time they had no brave Frenchmen for leaders; but neither had they a large and well equipped army to fight. If Bouquet could be defeated then Fort Pitt must fall.

Meekly glided alongside of Ballou and said—

"We must git around 'em and reach Bouquet in time."

"We can do it if he is slow on the march and they have to wait for him to come up," replied Ballou. "But if we're too late you can know that Colonel Bouquet isn't General Braddock. He'll never walk into a trap. He may be wiped out, but he won't be caught off his guard."

"I'm thinking there's 'nough Injuns to eat him up even if they have to fight him in the open," was Meekly's dubious reply. "Five hundred men, and hardly any of 'em had a taste of woods fighting!"

"When they try to eat up Bouquet they'll find they've got a tough mouthful," firmly rejoined Ballou. "I'm not depending on Bouquet's men, but on *him*. If any man can reach Fort Pitt in time to save it, that man is Bouquet."

"Glad to know you believe in him so strong. He must be a keen one from what I've heard. Let's kick our trotters a bit faster."

The ravine narrowed until scarcely wide enough for two army-wagons to pass

abreast. The dark timber on each side shut out the sunlight. They plunged through the dusky stretch and suddenly emerged into the sunlight. Ballou, who was in the lead, halted and took time to examine the surrounding heights, for the bottom of the ravine here broadened. With a whispered oath he threw up his long rifle and aimed it toward the top of the left-hand ridge.

"What is it?" fiercely demanded Meekly.

The spiteful crack of the rifle answered him, and for good measure Ballou pointed his finger. Something was bounding and rolling down the precipitous slope where fire had destroyed the growth.

"That was for the Conestoga!" muttered Ballou as he reloaded. "I shall always owe them for his death."

"Mischief's done! Let's be moving," snapped Meekly.

They covered a mile and halted as a faint quavering cry rang out on the left-hand height. The cry was caught up and repeated on the right. Ballou contritely said:

"Sorry, Enoch. I shouldn't have done it. But I was thinking of Black Beaver and the way he died, and when I saw the Indian pasted against the sky-line up there I couldn't hold my fire. Now we're in for a fight."

"A fight don't matter if it don't keep us from reaching Bouquet. We've jest got to git to him, and we can't afford to fight. Better to hide till it's dark and then see if we can sneak out of this cussed hole without being seen."

The calls of the scouts were tossed back and forth, and the white men knew it was only a question of minutes before some of the unseen savages would be streaming down into the path. To avoid discovery they struck into the growth on the right and climbed half-way up the slope. There they halted and waited for several warriors descending ahead of them to cut their forward course. Their only chance was to continue along the side of the slope; for to descend, or to mount to the top, would result in discovery. The savages in the path called up signals to the savages above. Then the white men heard the sharp cry of discovery as a trailer found the spot where they had commenced their ascent.

"They're howling to them above that we're on the way up," whispered Meekly. "We'd better swing lower down."

This they did, and when dusk filled the defile they were near the end of the broken country and snugly secreted until night would permit them to continue their journey.

With the darkness holding them to a walk, and yet protecting them from the enemy's scouts, they stole by several camp-fires at a safe distance. The Indians had halted, believing they had their quarry bottled up. In the morning they would find and destroy them. When a mile from the creek the forest-runners bore to the south until they came to the Forbes road, a gaunt skeleton of a highway and improved none since they passed over it earlier in the season.

Meekly wisely suggested that they were foolish to run their legs off when there was no imminent danger, and he urged they draw to one side and take some much needed rest. Ballou was agreeable, and they found a hiding-place a few rods from the road and ate what was left of their cooked meat, and then went to sleep.

Toward morning they awoke but remained very quiet as they heard guttural voices in the road. A considerable number of Indians were hurrying east, and the white men believed they were the same men they had eluded on Turtle creek.

Fearing lest they be discovered by some stragglers they remained in hiding until an hour after sunrise, when they resumed their journey. What with watching the rear, and keeping ears and eyes open for any signs of danger ahead, they made slow progress. It was a bit after midday when they crossed Bushy Run near the Byerly cabin.

They were forced to hide by the sudden appearance of several small bands of Indians, all painted and plumed for war. Mingoes, Delawares, Wyandottes, and Shawnees were recognized, as well as a scattering of Ottawas and Mohicans. All appeared to be in great haste to make some point east of the Run, and they passed from sight at a smart trot. It was this absorption in the business ahead, rather than the white men's cunning, that saved the two friends from being discovered.

"Phew! But that was too close for fun!" muttered Meekly as the two followed the Indians. At one o'clock they heard a scattering of shots directly ahead.

"——! It's begun!" whispered Ballou.

"They've nabbed him somewhere near Edge hill!" softly cried Meekly, wiping his bald head. "Those shots came from rifles. Bouquet's scouts have struck the red ——!"

They pressed on and the firing continued irregularly for a few minutes, then became heavier as being delivered in volleys.

"Regulars ordered up to support the scouts!" panted Ballou.

"That's the way the Braddock fight began!" cried Meekly.

"This won't be no Braddock fight," snarled Ballou. "If there's enough Indians, and they're prime ripe for fighting they may kill the army; but they'll pay a good price."

The firing became more sporadic and the forest-runners could picture the scouts falling back and the supporting troops slowly retreating on the head of the army. Then came another furious outburst. Ballou felt greatly alarmed. He believed that more troops were being rushed to the front, as was done on the Monongahela in 'Fifty-five, when the supporting and receding columns met and became hopelessly disordered.

Meekly, although having less faith in Bouquet because his knowledge of him was less, did not share his comrade's fear. He insisted:

"They're falling back in good order and doing but little shooting. What you're hearing is the Injuns attacking the baggage-train."

They raced on at top speed, knowing the Indians were fully occupied and would be giving scant heed to the rear. The road passed between low hills, heavily wooded; and after ten minutes of swift running, and when the yelling of the Indians sounded very close, they took to the woods on their left. As they reached cover they glimpsed several Indians limping along the road, all wounded and withdrawing from the fight.

The firing now was continuous as the enemy drove in the supporting columns and concentrated their attack on the baggage-train. The forest-runners came to the foot of Gonaware hill, where Bouquet's scouts, including Andrew Byerly, first discovered the Indians. A dozen of this advanced guard of eighteen men were scattered along the road and in the adjoining growth, dead.

"We got to go round the hill to git to Bouquet," said Meekly.

"The army's surrounded. Might as well try to break through here as anywhere," insisted Ballou.

Before Meekly could support his suggestion with any argument a new note rose above the hideous din, the terrific battle-cry of the Highlanders. They were charging with the bayonet, the weapon they ever loved the best, to relieve the pressure on the head of the army. No Indian ever cared to stand up before cold steel, and the painted warriors melted away before the furious onslaught.

"Here's our chance!" yelled Ballou, and he ran toward the men of the Black Watch now showing through the trees, their gay tartans filling the somber growth with patches of color. He came near to being skewered on a bayonet before a wild Highlander recognized him as a white man.

The order came to fall back and the firing increased in the rear. The savages, who had given ground before the charge, immediately advanced. Meekly and Ballou were among the last to retire, their long rifles doing much to hold the enemy at that point in check. They worked together, seeking shelter behind the same trees and taking turn in firing. The Highlanders, infuriated at their inability to engage at close quarters, hoarsely shouted their defiance as they retreated. Several of their number went down, but no attempt was made to carry in any of the dead.

As the forest-runners came up to where the army stood at bay strong forces on the heights began doing much damage with their plunging fire.

"Clear the ridges!" came the order; and a general charge with the whole line was made. Again the Indians promptly gave ground, but came forward when the regulars began to fall back. The attack on the baggage-train became more virulent.

It became evident that it was impossible to clear the road and move the army to the Run, half a mile distant; and the troops were thrown about the train in a wide circle.

The battle became general with warriors from seven fighting tribes pressing closer and closer as their confidence became conviction. Whooping with insane joy in their anticipation of another historic massacre, Delaware, Shawnee, Wyandotte, Mohican, Mingo, Miami, and Ottawa formed a red circle outside the white. The Highlanders' scowling eyes beheld naked men, painted black, flit from tree to tree, and glimpsed

others conspicuous with gay feathers and huge breast medals.

They had never contended with such a foe before. Their work in the siege of Havana had been along routine lines, but this battling with demons, with whom they could not engage at close quarters, was maddening. Nor was there the hesitance here that had marked the beginning of the Monongahela battle when Braddock's troops were butchered; for from the outset the mixed army of warriors was superbly confident of success. Braddock's foes were astounded by their victory. Bouquet's adversaries would be astounded did they fail.

BALLOU and Meekly found themselves in a milling mass of men, horses and cattle. All indications pointed to a repetition of the ghastly affair of 'Fifty-five; and the forest-runners cursed the provincial authorities who would allow a leader to go on a hopeless business with only five hundred ill-conditioned troops—troops, at their best, entirely ignorant of border warfare. Even Ballou's faith in Colonel Bouquet was no longer proof against the grim conviction that not a man would escape from the hellish circle.

"Looks bad, bad!" Meekly shouted in Ballou's ear.

"Worse if we don't die fighting!" yelled Ballou as he wiped the sweat and powder grime from his face.

But order began to evolve from the confused mass, and the pressure was relieved at different points as small detachments of the Black Watch, and the 77th (Montgomery's Highlanders) and the 60th Regiment, Royal Americans, made desperate sallies and pushed the enemy back. If Ballou was forced to believe the situation was hopeless he also realized that the men would meet death bravely. There were no symptoms of panic.

The position of the encircled army was a low hill, with the baggage train and wounded in the middle behind a wall of bags of flour. The road skirted the southern line of this meager barricade. Across the road were the cattle and horses. The troops formed the circumference of the circle.

So continuously and actively had they been engaged Meekly and Ballou did not glimpse Colonel Bouquet until the encircling line was definitely established. They came upon him composedly walking behind the line, encouraging his men. The bright uniform he wore made him a conspicuous target for arrows and bullets, and that he had escaped death thus far was due to the poor marksmanship of the enemy.

"We've come back to help you out, Colonel Bouquet!" cried Ballou. "This is my friend, Enoch Meekly. Just come from Pitt."

"My God! Don't tell me Pitt has fallen!" softly cried the colonel.

"Stands as stout as ever," assured Ballou.

Bouquet's eyes lost their blazing battle luster for a moment, and with an engaging smile he said:

"I remember you now, Mr. Ballou, even if your face is coated with smoke and sweat. You brought me news at Carlisle. What do you now think of my chances?"

Ballou promptly lied—

"I think you'll pull through fine, colonel."

"You won't live five minutes 'less you git out of them duds and into something that ain't so shiny!" roared Meekly. "And when you go, the army goes."

Bouquet glanced down at his gay trappings and sighed:

"I suppose it would be wiser. The men need me."

"They never needed nothing so much in their lives," howled Meekly, dropping to cover behind a dead pack-horse.

Bouquet quickly procured from the baggage a less striking uniform, and stepped behind a big chestnut tree and began to change. The bullets kept up a continuous rat-a-tat against the tree; but when the colonel had finished fewer missiles whistled by his head.

The forest-runners darted from point to point where there was the most likelihood of sighting an Indian and did excellent service with their accurate shooting. A hand or a foot was an ample target for their precise marksmanship, and an Indian wounded was one less to contend with. But as the hours wore away, and the enemy ceased none of its terrible ferocity, every face within the circle testified to the loss of hope. Should Bouquet be killed the next sun would shine on an army of dead men.

The soldiers continued to bear themselves in a most exemplary manner so long as their leader was walking among them, quietly

exhorting and encouraging. From the woods those Indians who had learned the indecencies of the English language, were shouting foul threats and showering the white men with vile names. Many of the provincial rangers, and some of the Royal Americans, recognized several Indians who had professed friendship for the English, and who had received presents at the different outposts.

These men were greatly incensed at the personal abuse now being heaped upon them; and more than once a man would start to rush into the woods to stop an unclean mouth.

"—— him! If he says that ag'in I'll git to him and cut out his harslet if I have to wade through ——!" roared Meekly, as an unusually powerful voice penetrated the din and directed to him personally obscene remarks.

"Shut up! Keep close. That's what he's hoping you'll be fool enough to try," growled Ballou. "Who is he?"

"You know him. The Wolf. Give him half a pound of terbaccer once, —— him!" growled Meekly.

This warrior was no kin to the Sleeping Wolf of the Ottawas, but a well-known warchief of the Delawares, who had made his name a terror to the Pennsylvania border.

Reports from different sectors of the circle were constantly being made to Bouquet and each was depressing. Captain Lieutenant John Graham and Lieutenant James McIntosh of the 42nd., and Lieutenant Joseph Randall, of the Maryland Rangers, were dead. Lieutenant Dow, of the Royal Americans, was carried inside the wall of bags shot through the body after he had slain three savages. The troops were nailed to the hill, and as the fighting was pressed most viciously by the enemy it was impossible to shift to a new position.

When dusk fell the active fighting practically ceased, and the men fell to the ground exhausted. Bouquet had the rolls called and found that sixty of his small force were either dead or wounded. The greater part of the casualties were Highlanders, who formed two-thirds of the army and who were entirely ignorant of woods fighting.

The drums were ordered to roll out the Grenadiers' March to inspirit the men. The weird skirling of the bagpipes also helped to make weary soldiers remember they were men. But no martial airs could still the moaning of the wounded inside the circle of bags. They were begging for water and there was no water. No fires were allowed and those who ate groped in the dark for their scanty rations. Under the shelter of a small tent Bouquet lighted a candle and wrote what he feared would be his last report to his Excellency, Sir Jeffrey Amherst.

The red cordon around the hill was maintained, and for several hours after sunset the savages fired occasional shots and kept up their storm of insults. Bouquet and Meekly volunteered for sentry duty but were so affected by the wounded men's incessant pleading for water that they expressed a desire to be relieved and allowed to attempt a trip to the swamp land on Bushy Run northwest of the camp. Already Andrew Byerly, who knew every foot of the country, had risked his life in penetrating the line of red sentinels, and had found a tiny pool and had brought back a hatful of water for the sufferers.

"The action will be resumed at daybreak. I shall need every man who can fire a gun," said Bouquet after learning of the forest-runners' offer. He paused as if weighing military necessity against mercy, and there came the moaning chorus—

"For God's sake, water!"

"Oh, dear Christ! Water!"

And so it was repeated over and over, and Ballou muttered—

"We can't stand it, colonel."

"Go!" barked the colonel.

They procured two large kettles and selected the north side of the circle for the point of egress. They paused only to warn the sentinels not to fire on them should they return, and then took up their hazardous quest. Thanks to the volume of abuse being shouted by the red sentinels they soon located the immediate danger points and advanced a few feet at a time between two of the enemy's outposts. Their greatest need was to prevent the kettles from banging against the trees, for the sky was overcast and the woods were black. They frequently halted to listen to the Indian sentinels hurling terrible threats at the whites, or laughing and talking among themselves.

"We will kill them all before another sleep," gloated a warrior within ten feet of Ballou. "Has my brother taken any scalps?"

The last was addressed to Ballou, who believed his presence had been noted and who was taking the bolder course and was feeling his way without any pretense to secrecy, except as he shielded the kettle from the trees.

"Three," boasted Ballou in the Delaware tongue, and increasing his pace.

"My brother goes to eat and dance?"

"To eat and dance and make himself strong for the next fight," was the guttural reply.

He passed on, with Meekly three feet behind him holding an ax in his hand. The sentinel had not seen them, nor had been seen by them although only a few feet had separated them. The incident convinced them that boldness was the best course so long as they did not come into physical contact with a savage and betray their possession of the kettles.

They soon were pleased to discover the glare of a light in the direction of the road west of the army. It was there that the dancing and feasting were to be enjoyed. With scalps to dance and food to eat no savage would prowl about the woods unless doing sentinel duty. The forest-runners walked more rapidly and made no particular effort to be stealthy.

Now the singing and whooping began at the fire down the road. As an echo came a similar outburst east of the beleaguered army. The Indians had blocked the road both east and west, and, out of rifle range, were now celebrating the victory of the afternoon. They were dancing the scalps of those who had fallen at the beginning of the battle; and what with frenzied boasting of personal exploits and blood-curdling shrieks of anticipation they made the night hideous.

"—— 'em!" hissed Meekly.

"Easy, Enoch. My feet are wet. We're at the swamp," cautioned Ballou.

It was a black night without even starlight. For some minutes they waded about the swamp before they could locate the shore of the Run. They drank their fill and filled their kettles and started back, the glare of the fire in the road serving as a guide. The return journey was more hazardous, for to save the precious contents of the kettles they had to sacrifice much freedom of motion and to proceed very slowly. Each knew the supreme test would come when the narrow neutral zone between the red and white sentinels was reached.

THE woods, however, were almost cleared of warriors except those posted to guard against any attempt of the white men to change their position. The two water-carriers could hear the occasional shots of a white sentinel firing toward some taunting voice, or a red man trying his luck. As the kettles were advanced through the growth the voices of the savages became audible in calls to each other and in taunts shouted at the dark camp. The scream of a horse, struck by a chance ball, evoked a demoniac shouting that ran entirely around the circle of the savage watchers.

Meekly touched Ballou's arm as a signal for him to halt. They knew they were close to the Indians and they sat down their kettles while they listened to locate the danger points. A man called out on their right, and was answered by a man directly in front of them. They picked up the kettles and moved a rod to the left and again waited to discover if the way to the camp was clear. They were startled to hear a guttural exclamation near by. They were enlightened when a Delaware called out:

"Much water has been spilled under this tree. Some white man is carrying water to the hill. Let my brothers watch and listen."

"That's the Wolf!" whispered Meekly, his hand trembling with anger as he took Ballou by the arm. "Making the rounds to see his line is tight. —— him!"

"No fighting. The wounded men need these kettles," warned Ballou.

The Wolf turned away from the white men. There was an uneasy stirring all about them as the sentinels moved about and brushed their hands over the ground in search of tell-tale moisture.

"They must 'a' slopped over when we set 'em down," whispered Meekly.

"Git ahead! My leg's wet. I've been spilling some," hissed Ballou.

They were now in line with the sentinels with the neutral strip before them. A sharp yelp behind them gave warning of an Indian trying to trail them by the water they had spilled. Ballou thrust a hand into his kettle and found it little more than half full.

"There is a white man very close!" loudly warned the savage on the ground behind them. "He has spilled much water."

He raised his voice in the cry of discovery to draw the other sentinels to the spot.

Warriors began moving in from both sides. Then came a crashing directly in front of them, and they felt the rush of a horse wildly breaking from the camp. The noise made by the crazed animal confused the Indians for a few moments, and the white men took advantage of the noise to plunge ahead. A musket exploded almost in their faces, blinding them for a second.

"Friends!" cried Ballou, as the sentinel sprang forward and lunged at the darkness.

"Friends with water!" yelled Meekly.

The Indians began firing toward the sound of their voices.

"Advance, friends, and be —— smart about it," said a ranger.

"Keep under cover," warned Ballou as he hurried on.

They met a small band of rangers hastening to return the savages' fire.

The water was divided among the sufferers, and so eagerly and thankfully did the wounded men finish it that Ballou offered to make another trip. But Colonel Bouquet would not listen to this, and wisely said that the second trip would mean death. So the forest-runners lay down behind a dead horse and endeavored to sleep.

The Summer night was very hot. A little rain fell and was a welcome relief to both sound and wounded. But the hours of darkness were few, and the first light revealed a clear sky that promised another broiling day.

Those who had fallen asleep were aroused by the yells of the Indians returning to complete their bloody work. Without any preliminary maneuvers the enemy pressed forward fiercely from all sides. Colonel Bouquet, still wearing his inconspicuous uniform, refused to allow his men to remain in one spot to be shot down like cattle.

While he could not advance, or fall back, he could repeat the tactics of the preceding day and direct sallies wherever the savages were overbold. Each dash cost lives, and too many tartans were strewing the narrow battle ground. Yet these bayonet drives caused the enemy repeatedly to fall back in spots and diverted him from carrying out an overwhelming attack.

Inside the circle affairs were approaching a crisis, as the bullets and arrows and terrible cries of the enemy threw the horses into a panic. The poor brutes were half mad for want of water, and when one was hit he would dash blindly back and forth until he could break through the line and escape into the dark forest. The packhorse men were badly frightened, and many hid among the wounded behind the bags, or in the bushes, and did nothing to quiet the frenzied animals.

There was one thought in the minds of regulars and rangers, woodsmen and drivers: The Indians would keep up the unequal assault until the army had been worn down to a score or two and then complete the butchery in one reckless charge. Already the confidence of the enemy was reaching the point when they would make a mass attack. They were giving ground more reluctantly when the Highlanders charged. Colonel Bouquet surveyed the ring of fighting and knew he had only a very brief period of time in which to turn defeat into success.

"I will give them more confidence," he muttered to himself as he observed how daring the Indians were growing.

Meekly and Ballou were among those holding the western segment of the circle. They shared the same tree at one side of the road and took turns in firing. It was about ten o'clock and the entire force was worn out with fighting, lack of sleep, and the lack of water. It was the crucial hour, and yet an incident occurred that for a bit took the two friends' minds off their impending fate.

A man rushed madly from camp and toward their position, keeping in the open road. As they shouted him to take to cover, he spun about and went down with an arrow sticking in his shoulder and a red streak across his forehead where a chance musket ball had all but shattered his skull.

"Hance Whit!" came from both parched throats; and Ballou leaped into the road and dragged the man to the tree.

He was unconscious from the glancing blow of the bullet and they had no water with which to revive him.

"He's —— lucky!" gasped Meekly, who was now stripped to the waist, his shiny bald head affording an excellent target every time he thrust it around a tree. "He'll die without knowing what's the

matter with him. We've got to git ourselves killed. It's a —— shame that you've got to go, Jarvis. Don't matter so much about me."

"Shut up!" croaked Ballou as he kneeled and tore open Whit's shirt and felt for a heart-beat. "Hance is only stunned."

For want of a better restorative he began shouting in the deaf ears.

Meekly's rifle cracked and Ballou was forced to spring to his side and guard against a rush. Meekly quickly reloaded and Ballou returned to the woodsman and resumed shouting. Whit stirred and flung a hand across his aching head and groaned.

"Wake up, Whit! Wake up!" yelled Ballou, breaking off the arrow and shaking him by the shoulders. "—— you! wake up! Lost your nerve?"

Whit's eyes rolled as he essayed to understand the wild speech.

"Wake up! —— you! Wake up and fight! Nell Marks is waiting for you at Fort Pitt!"

Whit reared up to a sitting posture, his eyes revealing returned intelligence.

"Jarvis Ballou!" he hoarsely muttered. "Nellie waiting for me? By ——! If you've lied I'll do for you worse'n a Injun!"

Meekly discharged his rifle. Ballou sprang to his side. A hideously painted savage was hanging from the crotch of a tree, feebly moving his arms.

"Yo-hah!" howled Meekly. " 'Nother red —— gone to his master, the ——! Yo-hah!"

Wolf, the war-chief, showed himself at the foot of the tree long enough to drive an arrow through Meekly's left arm. Then he ducked back and taunted them in his acquired and villainous vernacular.

"The red dog is ashamed to talk the language of his people," shouted Ballou in Delaware as he forced Meekly to the ground, broke off the arrow and withdrew the protruding head.

"Ho, white dog, who steals the talk of the Leni-lenape! They say the Wolf is coming to cut your throat!" promised the chief.

"Get up here, Whit, and keep the barrel of my rifle moving on one side of the tree," commanded Ballou. "I'll kill that skunk, or die trying."

"Can't you cut out that arrer head? It hurts," said Whit as he crawled on his feet.

Ballou impatiently yanked out his knife, skilfully made an incision in the top of the shoulder and yanked the arrow-head out.

"You said as how Nellie was waiting——"

"Shut your trap and keep me covered," growled Ballou.

Disregarding Meekly's profane remonstrance, and armed only with his knife and ax, Ballou threw himself on his stomach and wriggled under some bushes and commenced a turning movement.

"Ho, you dogs behind that tree! You've seen the sun for the last time unless we can keep you alive at the stake for a few sleeps," shouted the Wolf in Delaware.

Meekly's raucous voice in the same tongue shouted back a scorching defiance. The Wolf knew one of the two men behind the tree was seriously wounded and that the other, who talked like a Delaware, was waiting with a loaded rifle. The chief could afford to wait, for the sounds of the conflict around the remaining pack-animals was now a pandemonium; yet every time he glanced up to where one of his best warriors was hanging dead from the crotch of the tree he was impatient to secure these two men above all others. From the bush growth behind him sprang a lithe form, and he heard the beginning of a triumphant English howl before the ax split his head.

Without seeking cover Ballou ran back to his tree, waving a knot of hair and boasting:

"I've killed the Wolf. The Wolf hasn't any scalp now! Yo-hah!"

"Yo-hah!" huskily cried Meekly, struggling to a sitting posture. "Gi'me my rifle! I'll take a fair parcel of 'em with me before this wring is finished."

"Nellie waiting for me, and none of us can git clear. Oh, my ——!" groaned Whit, leaning against the tree and bowing his head.

"Hance Whit turning coward?" sneered Ballou.

"I've got something to live for, I tell ye. I've got heaven to live for—and this is ——! I ain't skeered of dying. Don't ye dast say that! I'm skeered of losing Nellie Marks."

For a minute he was overwhelmed by the enormity of the loss he was about to sustain; not life, but Mistress Marks.

"A woman would be proud of you, proud to call you her man, if she could see you now," jeered Ballou.

Whit lifted his head and stared thoughtfully at Ballou.

"No man, nor woman, shall say the Whits bred any cowards. I'll show you two how to die."

An officer, risking his life at every step, came running down the road, crying:

"Fall back! Fall back to the convoy! At the double-quick, fall back!"

"We'd ruther die right here, mister," yelled Hance Whit.

"All back to the convoy! The fight isn't lost yet! Fall back, but don't lose your heads. Colonel Bouquet has something they're not looking for. Fall back on the run, as if you're scared as ——!"

"The colonel is up to some game. He can beat the Indians at their own tricks," said Ballou, giving Meekly his arm. "Come along, Whit. Keep to cover. If any man can get us out of this hell it's Colonel Bouquet."

WHIT changed his mind about dying and went with them. Already the other outposts were falling back. As they took to the road the two supporting companies crowded in ahead of them and the mass rushed pell-mell back to the convoy. The troops ahead of them swung aside like two gates to let them through and then closed as if protecting a retreat. This movement lessened the circle, and with shrieks of triumph the savages came bounding on in a mass, believing the white man's hour had struck. They were met with a galling fire from the thin circle, but they had anticipated something of a rear-guard action and lost none of their confidence.

The attack was more hotly pressed and Bouquet's weak line was pushed back on the baggage-train and the camp of the wounded. This was as it should be from the red point of view. It was the result the Indians had been trying to force for two half days. Could the white men be crowded together in one compact mass their fate was written. Thus it had happened on the Monongahela and history was about to repeat itself. Thus believed the Indians, and they reasoned well had not Bouquet been "up to some game."

As a matter of fact when the pretended retreat began the Highlanders and some of the Maryland rangers were running along a slight depression in the forest floor to gain a position on the enemy's right flank. It was a most desperate risk, but one that had to be taken if a single man would escape. The thin line between the exulting savages and the convoy *must* hold until the flanking party struck; and the thin line fought most heroically. But the savages, with victory all but won, accelerated their attack with unusual fury. Nothing human could withstand such overwhelming odds long, and the line began to break.

A crashing volley, delivered almost pointblank, ripped into the flank of the savages, astounding the living to such a degree that they stood stupefied as the whirlwind in tartans, red coats, and fringed shirts bore down upon them.

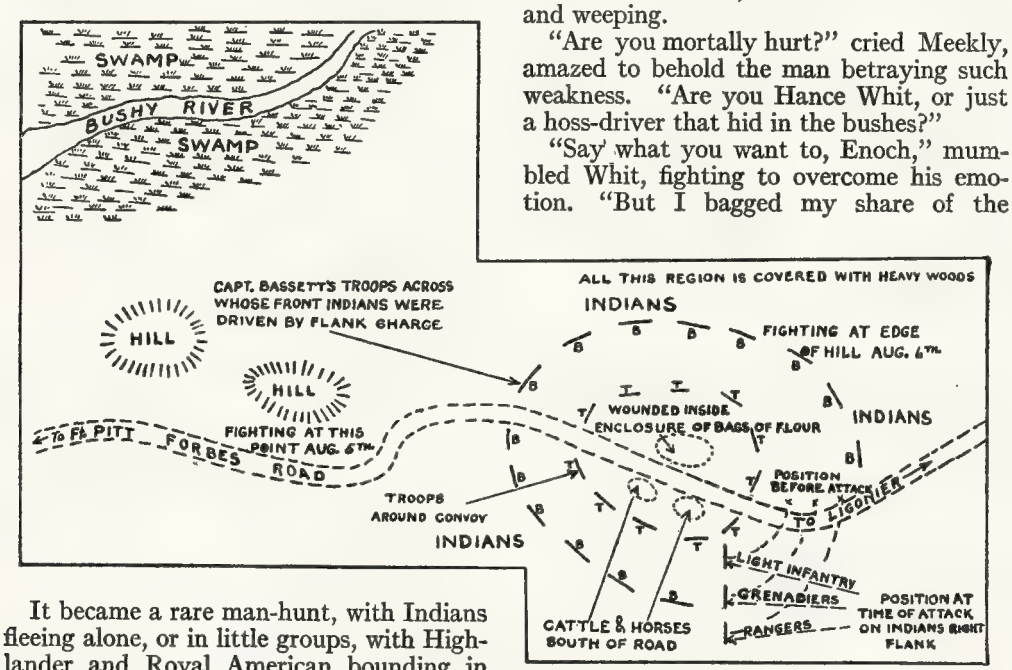
"By ——! At last—where we want 'em!" sceramed Meekly, clubbing his empty rifle.

And the Highlanders went in with naked steel, and those attacking the convoy suddenly discovered they had no support and at once gave ground. Those attacked in the woods recovered their senses, and, maddened at the thought of losing all the booty and scalps, stiffened their resistance and made a desperate fight. A more stubbornly contested battle between white and red men is not written in American history.

There was no stopping the wild Highlanders, who for two days had been huddled together like sheep, their comrades dropping at their feet, and denied even a swallow of water. There was no resisting the Royal Americans, most of whom had seen woods service enough to have many hateful memories to avenge. There was no checking the rush of the provincial rangers, very few of whom did not have the death or captivity of a relative to wipe out with blood. Meekly had shouted for all when he cried out that the red men were where the white men wanted them. And had the Indians been so many demons from the pit the bare-legged Highlanders, the red-coated men of the Sixtieth, and the rangers in their fringed shirts, would have had their way.

With grunts of joy, with hoarsely voiced oaths, with shrill yells of animal excitement, the long bayonets were plied until blood ran into the muzzles of the guns, and rifles were clubbed until only the long barrels were retained. The soldiers pressed on and gave the Indians no time to reload. As the enemy began to disintegrate and seek safety in flight their pursuers scattered in groups digging the hidden from behind trees and out of bushes and taking a rare toll.

As fast as the Indians endeavored to rally and regain their former advantage they were charged and scattered. Then they were finally driven across the position taken by Captain Bassett, of the Royal Engineers, and received the fire of his companies. This last surprize throughly demoralized them.



It became a rare man-hunt, with Indians fleeing alone, or in little groups, with Highlander and Royal American bounding in pusuit with the long bayonet ever ready for the terrible thrust, with each ranger and woodsmen an ax-armed Nemesis.

And thus was victory snatched out of defeat, with none of the frenzied fighters knowing they had broken the back of the Indian war and were opening the unknown West for settlement. The red man received his sentence that day.

Colonel Bouquet had adopted for tactics what Braddock's men had half done in a panic. Bouquet's retreat was feigned and drew the enemy into a trap. Bouquet also borrowed from the strategy of Captain Beaujeau, the gallant French leader at the Monongahela battle—an attack on the flank from a hidden ravine.

After it was over and the soldiers were limping, and panting, and straggling back to the bloody little hill Ballou managed to gasp:

"I said in Carlisle the colonel could do it. ——! What a fight! And the game lost until the last minute!"

"You oughter see yourself, Jarvis," puffed Meekly, who had fought with his left arm almost useless. "You look like a butcher."

They did not see Whit until they came to the flour bags and sank down to rest. Then they discovered him, sitting with his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands—and weeping.

"Are you mortally hurt?" cried Meekly, amazed to behold the man betraying such weakness. "Are you Hance Whit, or just a hoss-driver that hid in the bushes?"

"Say what you want to, Enoch," mumbled Whit, fighting to overcome his emotion. "But I bagged my share of the beggars," and he held up for their inspection the bloody barrel of his long rifle. "I'm plumb happy—that's all that's wrong with me. Ain't cried a tear before since I was a teeny shaver. S'pose I'm more'n half crazy. But can't you understand, man, we've licked 'em! We've licked 'em! Can't you understand that Fort Pitt is saved, and that I'm going there to find Nellie Marks, who's waiting for me?"

They understood. They respected him now and drew apart to leave him with his joyous meditations. Meekly was very grave as he hissed in Ballou's ear:

"Now you've done it! I knew you was doing it when you lied to him about the gal. You've got to kill him, or be killed the minute he l'arns the truth."

With a mirthless laugh Ballou replied:

"——! I told him the truth. She's sorry for me—but he's her choice— Come come, old friend. There's work waiting for me, and your arm needs a new bandage."

There was work waiting for all of them.

And the one hundred and fifteen men, dead wounded, or missing, sadly reduced the number of the workers. Sixty dead warriors were counted, and there were others who crawled into hiding to die. The trails left by the fleeing savages were marked with blood, showing they had many wounded. Some of the pack-horse drivers rushed through the woods to scalp the dead, while the horses they had permitted to escape were left to roam the woods.

This shortage of pack-animals forced Colonel Bouquet to destroy the bulk of his supplies. It took time and many hands to fashion litters for the many wounded; and water was not to be had until the army advanced to Bushy Run.

Ballou worked as one trying to keep his mind fully occupied with the immediate task. Whit, undoubtedly one of the happiest men who ever survived an Indian engagement, was of but little service. He walked about as one bewitched. When spoken to he jumped with alacrity to lend a hand, then forgot his purpose and left the work half-finished.

"That feller's head got a bad crack. He ain't come out of it yet," a ranger remarked to Meekly, and pointing to where Whit stood motionless, his arms heaped high with dry branches for a fire.

"Heart's what's troubling him," growled Meekly. "Hi! Drop that wood!"

With the new camp pitched on the bank of the Run and with the work of preparing food well under way, there came a volley from the surrounding woods. Without waiting for orders the light infantry rushed into the forest and quickly drove the prowlers away. This was the last attempt of the red men to block Bouquet's march to Pitt. Ten of the wounded died and were buried on the bank of the Run (the site of modern Harrison). Some of the savages skulked back to the main battle-field and scalped all the dead they could find and then hurried to Fort Pitt ahead of the army and paraded in sight of the garrison, and displayed the trophies, and gave their scalp-cries, and caused Ecuyer to fear that Bouquet and his army had been annihilated.

The army used three days in marching the twenty-five miles to Pitt; and never did mortals hear sweeter music than when the skirl of the pipes and the roll of the drums came to the ears of the garrison. Nor was there ever a more beautiful spectacle than when Meekly and Ballou, walking with the stealthy stride of the Indian, appeared on the edge of the forest with the red coats of the Royal Americans and the tartans of the Highlanders and the fringed shirts of the rangers showing behind them. The impossible had been accomplished. Colonel Bouquet had saved Fort Pitt.

Already red messengers were speeding to the Indian villages on and near the Alleghany and lower Ohio to spread the news. Already the villages were being deserted for new sites on the Muskingum and other remote streams. Could Colonel Bouquet have received then the support he requested, and which was necessary for his proposed campaign into the Ohio country, many lives in the next two decades would have been spared the torch and ax.

Although the Indians had lost the war their chagrin and rage were so great, because of the unexpectedness of their defeat, that for a time they would fight more viciously than ever. For the remainder of the year the victory at Bushy Run was to place greater hardships on the outlying cabin and settlement. Not again would the red hunters hunt in a pack, but in small bands, preying upon the individual and isolated family.

Through the gate poured the overjoyed garrison. There were mothers who had fled with little children through the gloomy aisles of the forest; men who had lost their families by red raids, and soldiers and rangers. Meekly and Ballou stood at one side, watching the animated scene. Whit moved across the clearing with slow and awkward steps, his heavy face distorted with doubt and diffidence. Then he saw Nell standing apart from the others, for she had come from nursing small-pox sufferers.

With a hoarse shout he started toward her and she cried out:

"Go back, Hance! Keep back! I'm from the hospital, lad. We have the spotted-sickness!"

But he kept on and gathered her up in his arms.

"Thou foolish one!" she rebuked, yet not struggling to escape. "Now leave me at once. I see Jarvis Ballou. Have you thanked him yet? Shame on you, sir!"

He released her, and with bowed head joined the forest-runners. For a minute he stood and breathed heavily, unable to

speak. His voice sounded odd when he managed to say—

"My life is yours, Jarvis, on two counts: First and last 'cause you fetched her back; second 'cause you dragged me from the road back to Bushy Run."

Ballou stared at him for a bit, and then reminded him—

"There remains a matter of a fight between us."

Whit choked and swung his shaggy head from side to side; then whipped out a long butcher knife and thrust the handle into Ballou's hand and hoarsely cried:

"Rip me open! I owe you two lives. Ain't got only one. Take it! It's the nearest you'll ever git into a fight with me."

Ballou dropped the knife and bitterly replied—

"Had it been different it never would be the handle you'd be offering me."

"Nor the p'int, neither!" cried Whit. "I talked wild up the Forbes road after she was took away. I was half-crazy. But I could no more hurt anything that Nell Marks loves then I could hurt her. I'm jest a big fool."

Ballou's set face relaxed, and he smiled not unkindly.

"Hance Whit, so far as I'm concerned there's only white wampum hanging 'tween you and me. Your place is here until you can take Nell Marks back to the settlements. For the next few months the Indians will kill and burn as never before. Watch over her. She's had her share of suffering and misery. Here's my hand. I'm going north to help lick Pontiac at Detroit. Say good-bye to her for me."

Unable to speak Whit seized the outstretched hand and squeezed it mightily. Meekly coughed, and growled:

"Tell Nellie I left a 'good-bye' for her. I'm off for Detroit. I've got a long score to settle with the Injuns. There'll be better fighting at Detroit then anywhere else."

IN AND about Detroit the two friends remained until the Indians scattered to their hunting grounds. Then they returned to Fort Pitt. When Colonel Bouquet gathered his thousand of Pennsylvania woodsmen and troops in the Summer of 1764 for an invasion of the Ohio country the two comrades were among the scouts to lead the way. After the Ohio tribes had sued for peace the forest-runners were of the escort that brought a hundred of the red man's captives back to Pitt. Then with no more war to engage their attention they wandered up the old Forbes road and recounted the various episodes which marked in their memory the historic path. They penetrated east as far as Carlisle.

It was dusk when they arrived, and Ballou left his friend and hunted up the shop of a gunsmith to buy a new rifle. No candle had been lighted in the little shop. The gunsmith, with powder on his hair and clean-shaven, was only a vague figure in the gathering gloom. In silence he heard Ballou's request and handed down a long rifle. Ballou thrilled as he handled the gun and noted its perfect balance. He called for a light that he might examine it. Still silent the gunsmith placed a lighted candle on the table and stood back in the shadows. It was a beautiful rifle and Ballou was hungry to possess it, but Bouquet's men were not richly paid. With a sigh he said:

"It's good to look at, but it's not for me. I must have a serviceable gun, but one cheap in price."

Without a word the gunsmith reached by him and turned the rifle over and laid a finger on a small silver plate set in above the patch-box. Ballou had noticed the silver plate and had supposed it was purely decorative. Now he held it close to the light and read:

To Jarvis Ballou From Hance Whit

"Nellie wrote it out for the man to 'grave in the plate, Jarvis," apologetically explained the gunsmith.

Ballou snatched up the candle and held it close to the clean-shaven face. For a full minute he stared, and then muttered—

"Hance Whit! You put my name—I don't understand."

"Made it for you six months ago. Only way we had to show you how we feel for what you done for both of us. Nellie always said you'd come back some time. So I've always had it here in the shop waiting for you. Jest wait a minute."

He darted through the back of the shop and soon returned with a sturdy infant in his arms and laid it on the table. The baby reached out a dimpled fist to the shiny silver plate.

"Nell's boy," muttered Ballou. "Seems to know a good gun—early."

"He oughter!" exclaimed Whit. "His name is Jarvis Ballou Whit. You'll take the rifle; then come in and see Nellie. She's waiting."

Ballou walked to the door, then swung back, and bruskly said:

"Aye. I'll take the rifle. Once I said nothing but white wampum. I meant it. So I'll take the rifle. But I'm in a heap of a hurry. Some time—when I'm passing through—I'll step in and see Mistress Whit."

He fumbled at his neck and drew out a string of purple and white wampum and looped it over the baby's chubby wrist.

With a little smile he said:

"Carrying that in his fist he's safe wherever Pontiac was accepted as leader. He may like to have it and look at it when he grows up. It was worn by Pontiac. Poor Rickards had it on when he was killed. Express to Pitt found it round his neck when they stopped to bury him. So long as the Indians of the northwest remember the name of Pontiac the wearer of that wampum will find all roads open to him. Good-bye."

Their hands met over the crowing youngster.

THE END

None But the Brave

by F. ST. MARS

Author of "The Price of Leadership," "Fire Brat Occasions," etc.

THE picture was in two halves—blue sky above and bottle-green sea below; and, to finish off, a silver gull floated between the two. There was no land.

The silver gull was watching a tiny dark object twiddling in the water. He thought it was a fish in trouble, or something, and settled to see. Then the tiny dark object vanished, and huge jaws shut with a metallic snap upon his webbed and paddling feet from below, and he vanished too, utterly and for ever, with one last terrified yell down into those jaws.

Swallowed whole he was—feathers, flapping wings, and all—at one gulp. But it was a fearsome end, all alone there upon the face of the father of all the oceans, without a living thing in sight to pity him.

Nothing happened after that for a bit, till presently the little dark object appeared upon the surface again; twiddled for a space, then came to the conclusion there were no more feathered fools about; rose bodily, huge and dripping, and turned into an enormous beast—not a fish—eight feet long, seven feet round, fat as a pudding, and weighing about eight hundred pounds.

It rolled its mighty, dirty-gray bulk in the trough of the waves, that brute, and it roared, and— Sea lion? Giant seal? No. But a link between the two. In fact, a full-grown male sea-bear in the zenith of his "day."

Those who have seen sealskin coats and muffs and things in the furriers' and upon the backs of fair humans, have seen his skin, or the hide of his species, anyway.

Fur seals, they who go down to the sea in boats to slay them, call them; but they are not true or earless seals, all the same; not the smooth, gentle-eyed creatures of the aquarium and the circus; not, in fact, the same tribe at all.

This huge sea-bear is distinguished by his very short face, his humped, immense shoulders, his peculiar, long, narrow hind-flippers, and when on land by his upright carriage and quick gait—about six miles in twenty-four hours, against the sea-lion's short two. Altogether this sea-bear is an odd beast, and not lightly to be tampered with.

But if there is one thing more than another in which the sea-bear is peculiar, it is his amazing speed in the water.

As he headed steadily northward, sometimes alternately appearing and vanishing as he cut through the long rollers, sometimes merely a short, broad head cutting a hissing white wedge of foam, the one point about the sea-bear that held the eye all the time was his speed. Never for an instant did he stop. That was perhaps the other point about him—his eternal and uncanny, restless motion.

Night added itself to the utter loneliness of the scene, but never did Ursinus stop. And scarcely ever did he change the direction of his northward course.

Times there were, truly, when he moved about the ocean even a little faster than he was already going—though it scarcely seemed possible—to fish; to pursue the great silver-sided Chinook salmon maybe, and once to haul up by its tail from unknown depths a fourteen-pound thing looking like a cod, and many times to "chop" at smaller fish in the passing. Also, upon one occasion he fell in—and out again—with a female common seal, whom he chased for five miles, till a fifty-foot humpback whale came up as silently as the grave between them, and Ursinus turned back to his journey in a hurry.

After that he continued his way, perilous as the way of an explorer in darkest Africa; but always holding to his line, hour in, hour out, day in, night out, in spite of the fourteen-foot killer whale—or his knife-blade back fin rather—who would have chopped him into two quivering halves if his marvelous agility in the water had not avoided the soulless beast's rush; in spite of the Steller's sea-lion, who had lost an eye from a fight presumably, and who seemed to want to make Ursinus pay for it, and rushed at him open-mouthed, till the combatants nearly ran into an iceberg inhabited by a starving polar bear, who so nearly caught the one-eyed Steller's sea-lion that Ursinus lost him.

And finally, but not least wonderfully, in spite of the fact that he had absolutely nothing at all to guide him in all that trackless waste of waters but his own instinct, and possibly the "feel" of a few currents and the position of the sun.

THERE were, however, others there besides the hateful, cruel, black-and-white killer whales who were expecting Ursinus and his company, or other companies like them. At any rate, once, from a whitened wave-crest, Ursinus looked over a full mile of ocean, and caught sight of the tops of dipping, nodding masts beyond; and the man perched, with telescope, in one of those masts gave a yell, which caused two little boats, each with three men, a rifle, and two shotguns in it, literally to tumble from the small ship owning the masts, and to race like mad things upon a course that would, if quick enough, intercept Ursinus.

Ursinus, who was fishing his way along slowly, for once, in that strange, smooth, regular switchback of all the eared seals, became suddenly and alarmedly aware of the bows of a small boat sliding down the long, smooth back of a wave, almost upon him.

Ursinus' quick eyes could see the man standing up in the bows of the boat, his arms raised in front; could catch the unmistakable bar-like gleam of the sinking sun along the raised rifle-barrel; could distinguish clearly the wicked stab of flame that licked out and back therefrom; could hear the short, bitter report that followed; and could feel, by both concussion as well as by splash, and hear the .303 rifle-bullet, weighing 215 grains, which hit the jade-green water so exactly in front of his own nose that the splash of it went into his eyes.

Another two inches nearer, a fraction of a flipper-thrust greater speed, a little less abruptness in his curve downward, and—no Ursinus! The lead-nosed death would have drilled clean through him.

As it was, it was Ursinus who was drilling—through the water and low down,

quivering, vibrating, shooting forward in one straight, streaking, silvered line, with such amazing momentum that it seemed as if he could not be a thing of flesh and blood at all, but some man-made projectile hurled, with untold muzzle velocity, through the green fog of the watery underworld from a gigantic gun.

When Ursinus did come up it was but to show his nose and the top of his head nearly half a mile away; but it was enough for him to hear a dull thud, which was the shotgun speaking to another sea-bear—for there were others in that scene, though Ursinus may not have known it, all heading one way.

Ursinus swam pretty fast for the rest of that night; and when he rose at dawn, as the wan east was lighting the wave-tops with steel and the dark hollows were paling to purple, it was to find a dank, humid fog abroad upon the face of the waters, shutting in everything.

But there was no need for that beast to see. Even if he could not have smelled the land—which he could—a steady, vast and arresting sound, rising and falling upon the dead silence of all around, instantly guided him. It was like unto the murmur of "a great city awaiting the event" afar off; but it was not a great city all the same.

Ursinus headed straight for that tumult—and he seemed to need no other guide through the fog—as a racehorse makes for the winning-post; and there was an air about his terrific speed, his impulsive, reckless haste, which seemed to suggest that he had at last reached his goal, was late, and knew it.

Soon he fell among rocks, dripping and spouting in spray, and the sea gradually filled with swerving, curving, diving, arriving, snorting shapes—sea-bears going ashore.

Ursinus could not wait to navigate this wonderful crowd. He was swiftly working himself up into an agony of expectation, the ultimate climax of that same longing and expectation which had brought him, mostly alone, across more than twelve thousand square miles of pathless, landless ocean to realize. And now that the thing itself was at hand, he seemed no longer to be a beast in control of himself at all; and nothing, apparently, not even a gunshot, would have stopped him.

He dived deep down under the big, gathering fur-seals, and straight as a silver torpedo—and not unlike one when seen from above—he swam, as few beasts can swim, for the beach. Then the floor of the sea shelved upward, and he with it, till, roaring, splashing, foaming, he arrived, hurled bodily ashore on the lap of a wave.

Then he stopped dead—and well he might.

THE fog had lifted a bit, and he could see a good way over a rocky, shelving, pebbly beach; and the whole of that beach along the shore to the right, along the shore to the left, inland, far into the shifting fog for miles, was one heaving, squirming, struggling, battling, growling, hissing, whistling multitude of sea bears.

Never were there so many sea-bears. Never did it seem possible that there were so many sea-bears crowded into one place. To be exact, there were upon the beaches—or "hauling grounds," as the natives call them along those Arctic shores—no fewer than two hundred and ninety-four thousand sea-bears, all either upon the shore, crowded out of the shore inland, or swimming about among the breakers in the offing, trying to land upon the shore.

Nevertheless, in spite of utter chaos, there was, Ursinus saw at second glance, a rough sense of order in the confusion. The adult and old males—or "bulls," as they are termed—having nearly all arrived quite a month before the females, had each taken up a station unto himself, which he was now trying to fill with every female sea-bear he could coax, grab or round up within his jurisdiction, and to fight off all rivals who would encroach upon or oust him from his "claim." The result was half —— let loose in the wild, and deafening beyond words.

Ursinus came up, "like a god from the sea," all wet, glistening, and dark gray in streaks and patches, shaking the drops from his long, bristling whiskers as he rolled up beyond the waves, waving his massive head so that the great neck muscles gathered and ran under his incomparable coat all up and down his heavy neck and great shoulders.

He did not look sweet, that big male fur-seal, as he spurned the frothing tide and hurled himself high and dry, roaring with unutterable hoarseness. There was a smoldering fire in his eyes, and his bristled lips were drawn back, showing the big, cruel fangs that were the terror of even large fish. Compared to the other "bulls" even he was not so sweet, for he was almost a record "bull" for size, and in his prime.

Things being as they were, he could not take ten wriggles—'twere gross flattery to call his progress a walk—before he trespassed upon some other bull's "claim," or "pitch," or "station"—call it what you will.

The little females—dainty, soft-eyed, gentle ladies no more than four feet long, two and a half in girth, and weighing 70 to 100 pounds—were landing all around him. One was half a yard ahead of him.

A big bull, bang ahead, shoved his great cranium round, grabbed her by the scruff of the neck with disgusting roughness, and hurled her bodily up on to his pitch. Another bull behind hurled forward, seized the hapless female, wrenched her horribly and brutally from the first bull, whose teeth left a red scar four inches long—though she never said anything, never complained, never retaliated—and lumbered aside with her.

Then Ursinus arrived; and it was some arrival, too!

Roaring furiously, and in a scattering shower of spray and pebbles, Ursinus came —flung along, literally, for all the world like a great mass of rock hurled by the force of some big explosion. It was an impressive introduction, and though other bulls were charging about in a very ferocious manner, there was none who delivered his ultimatum of war quite after this crashing fashion.

The first bull was knocked clean over out of the way; the second bull, a grizzled beast, scarred and old in war, met the force of the impact with something between a growl and a whistle of knocked-out wind. In a flash, before he could let go the unfortunate lady sea-bear, Ursinus, with jaws agape, had seized him by the throat; and once there, there Ursinus stayed—worse than any bull-dog.

IT WAS not a gentle picture, that fight which followed, because the combatants were about eight feet long—the one rather over, the other rather under—and in the highest of high condition of fat, blubber, muscle and sinew that months of good feeding and the prime fish of many seas could make them.

It was in fact not a fight at all in the true sense, for Ursinus had got his patent strangle-hold, and for a long time the other could not break it. He writhed, he reared, he plunged, he cannoned into rivals, he barged into parties, he floundered over the frontiers of pitches, he bit, he snapped, he wrenched, he tore, and all the time he roared a hoarse and grating roar of indescribable ferocity; but never for one second did he unhitch Ursinus, whose dead weight, by the way, alone took some shifting.

Indeed, nothing but sheer, colossal brute strength could break him away, and in the end, after one of the most devilish protracted struggles, sheer brute strength did. But the result was horrible, for—well, something had to give way, and it was not Ursinus' jaws.

Ursinus' foe staggered, blundering drunkenly sidewise, and lay for a moment still, a red ghastliness about his throat, and spouting blood in crimson streams.

Ursinus, however, had been brought up in a world—the great, cold, cruel world of the sea—wherein there is no excuse, and pity does not exist. He was upon his foe instantly with a lumbering charge, whistling rage as he came, and that foe rose up to meet him, roaring still, but shocking to behold.

The gentle little female sea-bears who were landing, and those the old bull had gathered into a harem round him, stumbled and rolled every way to get out of reach of the warring giants, who were as likely to scrunch hold of them in their blind, maddened fury, as of each other.

Some were grabbed by other bulls on adjoining pitches in consequence; some fled; but it made no odds to the battling bulls. Nothing could make any difference to either of them now, except— Ah! The old bull with one last rending, choking roar, flung himself, rolling, down the beach, and the trail behind him was red as a red stair-carpet. The waves took him in a spout of spray, and he vanished from sight. It was as well. There was scarce room for the living on that beach, let alone the dead.

After that Ursinus, formally and by right of conquest, annexed the station hitherto owned by the old bull sea-bear, and held it valiantly against all comers through many bloody battles, through stress of storm, starvation, and thirst, for three solid months, during which time he had accumulated, and had to guard, a harem of no less than fifteen dainty wives.

And when at long last he finally took to the sea again, late in August—and with him all the grizzled warriors, fathers, mothers, flappers, and "dudes"—he was weak, emaciated, torn, and scarred almost beyond recognition; but he had made good, and, in so doing, had done his duty.

The Thrust

A Complete Novelette

by B. J. STOLPER

THE rich, disordered room lay in doubtful light. The dissipated faces of the two men, not five feet apart, were scarcely thrown into relief by the flickering wicks between them. Suddenly, glaring sunshine shot across the ash-strewn table, half-littered with flagons, decanters and fragments of pasty. A broad outpouring of brightness paled the sickly wax-flames. The guttered silver candle-sticks glinted.

"Morning!" said the intent gamester, lifting his heavy eyes.

Distastefully, he pushed aside his long clay churchwarden, and took a gulp of his arrack punch. The room was stale with hanging tobacco smoke. It made his reddened lids smart. He propped an elbow on the board; his brutal chin sagged down upon his clenched fist. Slowly he turned his head from his befuddled host to look askance toward the Chesapeake.

A blinding sun stood above the waters. Voices sounded. The plumed hats of gentlemen grew visible, and the naked, glistening backs of negro rowers. A wherry was oaring toward Jamestown.

His dull gaze turned back into the room. It grew wicked as it fell upon the coquettish row of feminine slippers, each single, unmated, that ranged provocatively against the oak paneling yonder, behind young Sir Francis' high-backed chair. They were of all shapes and sizes—gaudy, trim, demure. He moistened his gross lips enviously.

'Twas a queer taste, a pox o' some gallants' luck! Two or three yon irresistible fop had brought over with him from London. Some came from Paris; he had boasted of them. And some—a fine many!—he had already culled delicately here in Virginia.

In young Sir Francis' white fingers, the little leather box hovered, poised—out tumbled the dice upon the green cloth.

"A main!" he cried greedily.

"The third, in a half-hour!"

His opponent smothered a sour oath as he stared at the five yellow cubes. Each lay upturned incredibly. Pest! The whole run of the feverish night almost, they had gone against him. He had lost more than he could afford. And now—again. There they lay. And each added its separate, cursed value here, as twice before, to spread the strongest throw known. He glowered up at the handsome face opposite, sensual as his own, yet younger, less jaded, for all they had harried the same maddening hours here together. Suddenly the defeated gamester snatched up the dice in a rage, and flung them scattering through the open window.

"Devil fly away with them!" he exclaimed.

A startled yelp sounded from without. The black face of a slave appeared for an instant, vanished, and reappeared grinning. A dusky claw stretched into the room, offering four of the recovered dice.

"The Thrust," copyright, 1922, by B. J. Stolper.

"Set them on the sill, Ajax," stammered Sir Francis. Liquor had thickened his usually mellow voice. "And tarry a moment! Hunt up t'other die—one more—before thou'st for the stables."

"Aye, massa, me find him."

"Three mains!" repeated the loser. He ran a dry tongue over his lips. "Burn me, Frank, burn me, Vaux, you're in league with the noseless one!"

The winner showed his teeth for a moment in a blurred smile under his small mustachios.

"With fortune, with fortune merely."

"With the devil!"

"Have it your own way, Kit," replied Sir Francis yawning. "Will you play further? Here's Ajax with the full five."

"I have dropped you fifteen hundred of tobacco," said the other violently. "In two nights!"

He rose, pushed back his stool, and began ordering his tumbled lace neckpiece, his disheveled hair, with trembling fingers. His long rapier knocked against his legs. He had forgot to lay it aside the evening before, in his avidity to be at his revenge. He shifted the shoulder sash impatiently, and took a passionate turn up and down the floor. At the far end of the room, he recoiled abruptly. His head had almost collided with the low, sloping rafter.

"'Ware your sconce," remarked Sir Francis languidly, stretching back in his damasked chair. "You're a tall man, Kit."

"Stap me, Frank!" repeated the other venomously. "Three mains! Is there *any* gift ye lack? Filthy fortune herself must be your strumpet!"

"So-so."

"I can not grasp it!"

The winner blinked, as if to clear his clouded wits.

"I crave your pardon?"

Insolently the one called Kit turned his pouched eyes full upon the young cavalier.

"Certain, ye must have found the philosopher's stone!"

There ensued a fateful pause.

"You hint at cheating? Loaded dice?"

Sir Francis sat slowly erect, rose, then, from his chair, and stood swaying. The disparity in figure between the two men became apparent. Sir Francis Vaux was slender, rather below the medium height. The other looked close upon six feet, long armed, and powerfully made.

"Do you, by any chance——"

"I did not say so," came the grudging response.

"No, but, damme——"

His host compressed his somewhat full lips for an instant, sought out the other's ugly gaze, and shrugged his satin shoulders as the bloodshot eyes turned away. His own heated brain had resumed its wonted coldness at the sudden clash.

"You're jaded, Kit," he said at last.

A deadly note still lingered in his voice.

"Well, sit down. I'll brew you a fresh punch before you're saddled for home. And your revenge—at your leisure. Dice, cards——"

The loser smiled unpleasantly. He kicked aside his hard stool, and drew up and sank into a padded-velvet armchair. All the night, with a gamester's superstition, he had stubbornly cramped his hulking frame.

"Revenge?" he said. "How seek it?"

HE WATCHED the quick, white fingers moving for a while among the various flagons. This whole year past, he knew, he had been jealous of the mincing popinjay, with his sniff of the French court, his favors from Whitehall, his name at the duello, and his damnably pretty invasion of the provinces. Before *he* came—the devil!

Once others had cut a figure here. Now gaming, women, honors, to this young sprig they fluttered all. 'Twas even said he was well seen of Governor Berkeley, bitter old crab, who hated all Englishmen this side of ocean. Duello? A slit weazand, maybe, would have blooded his conquests for him, Sir Francis Vaux. Now, curse it——

Another mark against him. He had forced a false position. Only a yokel, a chawbacon, would draw steel on his host over drink and the dice. And so—well, a clumsy attempt to smooth away yon innuendo, fruitful as it might have proved.

"Certain," he said disagreeably, "ye must have found the philosopher's stone. Why, 'tis common gossip! Ye take ship for France, for school, and there's 1660, and Charles becomes king, and ye're rewarded for the splendid risk, no less! Ye come of age, and there's an obliging parent steps into heaven, and a snug plantation left to your hand. A title, a manor, cleared tillage,

and thirty Africans. Ye woo the cards, ye woo the steel, ye woo the boudoir—twenty-two years of age, and a dashing Rupert, stap me! There's a twenty-eight hundred of Virginia leaf in the past fortnight, that *I* know on, from Sedley, Towne, your crony old Beauchamp, and the —— knows how many others. Ye cast the dice, split me! and there's three mains in a half hour!"

"Quaff your punch," said Sir Francis.

The other took a copious swallow of the fresh brew.

"Let me tell ye something," he said with ugly amiability.

"Tell on."

" 'Tis this, odd rabbit it! Why, dice, cards, cock-fighting, that's gaming. That's fortune, and that's fortune. But ye do it in everything!"

"Yes——?"

"Take the duello, for example. Now skill might have ye there, ye will allow——"

"Will I so?"

"—and yet you pinked Soane, and t'other, the what's-his-name officer, though both nice enough hands at the weapon in their way, in their way. Psha! As for the sweet sex, damme, the pretty sex, the stubborn baggages—." He leered his reluctant admiration. "How d'ye accomplish it?"

The underlying spitefulness in all that flattery, though covert, was patent. Sir Francis' delicate eyebrows had risen slightly and remained indifferent. But with the other's last words his cold expression thawed. Women? He smiled somewhat complacently, and tilted his shapely head sidewise toward the extraordinary row of love-trophies that ranged against his mantel.

"So-so," he responded.

The other's smoldering jealousy slipped control a little.

"Egad," he exclaimed, "let me tell ye something, though. You're not the only one. I'm a proper figure of a man!"

"I do not doubt it."

"I am, curse me! Before you dawned on us green provincials, let me tell you, I was cock of this walk. I was much sought after at the assemblies. The belles were all for having Kit, I'll swear; nothing but Kit would do, now this and now that. But there, too, burn me, ye put my nose out of joint."

"I am sorry," said Sir Francis satirically.

"—— your sorrow! I am the loser all around!"

As the potent mixture of liquors warmed him, his discretion loosened, together with his tongue.

"Come now, Frank, I'll be frank with ye." He laughed offensively. "Not a bad jest. Kit would be Frank, if Frank would be muzzled! Do ye know why I have diced with ye, these two nights?"

"I have my suspicions," murmured Sir Francis.

"There's such things as rules, look'ee, even in luck; the reason demonstrative, and the proverb infallible. When Ann Forrest turned cool to me, and Lady Julia—egad, I thought, my Sir Francis is all for the ladies, they're all for him. I will have my revenge! Lucky in love, unlucky in gaming. Hark in your ear. A thought struck me—I would seek ye out at the hazards!"

"Diabolical."

"Eh!"

"Keen, keen. My suspicions were false."

"Curse it, I was a fool. Ye swept stakes from all others; e'en from old Beauchamp; but at last I thought I had ye double-knotted, maybe. And why? A loser in loves, 'gainst a winner in loves, and the dice for the weapons!" He paused sourly. "I was cock of the walk—now I'm a plucked fowl, in addition!"

A falsetto titter greeted his statement. His listener strove in vain to control his usual affectation of pretty languor. A moment he pinched his sleek lips together between jeweled thumb and forefinger. Then his veneer of courtesy thinned, evaporated, and he burst into a high-pitched gust of almost feminine merriment.

"Oh! oh! oh! You'll be the death of me!"

The one called Kit lost countenance.

"Ye laugh at me?" he said harshly.

"With you, with you. By the mass, what a plot. Guy Fawkes was an ass compared to you, Kit. But you shall have your reward."

"You mean by that, Sir——"

"Come, Kit, don't grow wrathful. *Imprimis*, I take that from no man, taller or smaller. *Secundus*, the quarry is not worth it—no petticoat is. Here—" he waved his soft, white hand toward the row of little slippers—"select your pretty game. Choose, choose your fancy. And if a nice indifference and my further good offices can any wise avail you, why, you shall have its mate also, presently, together with the jade herself!"

He rose, on the word, moved unsteadily toward his oak mantel, and began to rummage callously among the dainty footgear.

"Here's Paris, here's London—ah, Fontainebleau!—here's Venice, Venice, melting Andalusia—but, tut! They're all too distant, distant as Trebizond for you, my burly good Cupid. But here; what do you say to this?" He held forth an alluring, silken mule, gold-bedizened. "Virginia! Here's your Lady Julia's for you, Kit. I will renounce in your favor. Or is here some other you prefer? 'Yea,' " he quoted sacrilegiously, " 'I have a goodly heritage.' "

The other smirked nastily. He had been repressing his malevolence all this while. Cast-offs, is it? But at the sudden Puritan phrase that slipped so unexpected from the young rakehell's mouth, he pricked up his ears. He stared at Sir Francis, blinked once or twice, and protruded his lips.

"Pho," he uttered at last, negligently. "D'ye truly mean this, Frank?"

"Certes, I do."

"Odds now, confess. Ye never dreamed I'd take ye up!"

"My word is not doubted."

"And ye'd lend me your kindness to any of your old flames?"

"Any in the Americas!"

"You would e'en step aside, then?"

"Like this!"

Lady Julia's slipper flashed through the air, and fell among the litter of ashes, crusts and stains that strewed the table.

"Then step me aside for your little Puritan."

"*What!*"

"For your own blacksmith's wife. Never mind your good offices."

"You—you——"

"She's too luscious for him, and just good enough for me—if ye'll but keep that undoubted word of yours, and not renege on't."

From the young cavalier's high-colored face every drop of blood had queerly drained, leaving it a strained, sickly white. It was not a straightforward face, for all its handsome lines. Greed, indulgence, and vice not a little, had already begun to mark their stealthy sign-manuals upon it, despite his youth, in a slight looseness about the full lips, an imperceptible thinning of the hair at the temples, a faint, petulant wrinkle above the well-arched, thin-nostriled nose. He was twenty-two years of age; but the hot color of his cheeks, if one looked closely, might well promise to become a dull flush at thirty-five, a network of tiny, purple veins at forty, a pair of gross, pendulous wattles thereafter, like old Beauchamp's, fed by port, rich living, and unbridled passions.

"How came you by that lie, Kit Rood?" he said with difficulty.

"Lie?"

"Yes, damnable lie. There is no more truth in it——"

The other sneered.

"Than if she were your sister?"

Sir Francis' eyes grew injected. A vein swelled up on his forehead, a black shadow appeared between his eyebrows.

"By heaven," he said in a low voice, "do you bait me?"

"Why, what's the to-do?" cried the other stupefied. His amazement, it was plain, was no particle assumed. "Oons, Frank, she's a pretty piece, but——"

"Enough!"

"Ye passed me the lie, my young cockerel, but let that go for the moment. I am consumed with curiosity. Is it possible that this lovely pious, this little Dorcas——"

"I will not have her name mentioned. Not by you, and not over the gaming table!"

"Well, by ——!"

The gross mouth fell open, the heavy jaw dropped. Incredulously the bloodshot gaze wandered from the pale face opposite, slid down to the feminine slipper lying flung there amid the ignoble wreckage, rose toward the famous, or infamous, row of tokens upon the mantel, and came stupidly back again to Sir Francis' inexplicable pallor.

"Frank, Frank, ye've not—. No, that's impossible. Not religion? Certain, your crop-eared blacksmith has never twanged his nasal psalms o' your Catholic conscience?" He flapped his thick palm down upon the five dice. "No, damme, not if these are eloquent. Not he! I am an ass. And yet—. Heh-heh, the ways of grace are unfathomable. If not our sooty mountain-in-the-Lord, our righteous David Adoniram Craig—" he rolled the two biblical names with gusto—"then perhaps his shapely little, saintly little——"

Sir Francis sprang from his seat.

"Curb your impossibly filthy tongue, sirrah!"

"Sharp words."

"Will be followed by sharper thrusts!"

"Sweet. Anon, anon, as the tapsters say. I'll draw you for those in a plenty of scarlet fluid presently. Meanwhile, what a fiend does this mean? Stap me, if I lunge at your gullet till I——"

He sprawled back against the velvet rest, threw one long leg dangling over the padded arm of his chair, and gaped up at the infuriated face above him with a mingled expression of malice and bewilderment.

"My wits are addled. Assemble! assemble! Is this Frank Vaux? Am I dreaming? Sir Francis Vaux?—that my lord black Rochester himself is said to have approved as a proper gentleman profligate?" His undershot chin jerked toward the mantel. "Paris—London—melting Andalusia. But if this, but if these—and there they are—then why not——?"

He stopped.

A startled comprehension sprang into the look he fastened upon his tight-lipped host.

Slowly, under his fixed, sardonic stare, Sir Francis' colorless skin had begun to suffuse to a fiery crimson.

The one called Kit blinked his inflamed lids together rapidly, opened his mouth, closed it, pursed up his lips to a long, noiseless whistle; then suddenly and uncontrollably began to laugh as if he would shake to pieces.

"'Tis out of a play, by ——. Oh, gemini!"

He slapped his thigh at the delicate oath; tears commenced to stream down his cheeks; he kicked out with his left foot convulsively till his rapier clattered; disjointed words of an unspeakable coarseness shot spasmodically from his throat between chokings and fits of coughing brought on by his paroxysm of mirth.

"Incredible, stap me! Unbelievable, unbelievable! Oh, I shall die. Francis, Sir Francis Vaux! the gilded rakehell! the lurid light o' ladies! the satin cynical! the har—the hardened—the hardened Don Juan of two continents——"

A fit of coughing made him clap his hands to his throat, while his eyes protruded.

"Oh, slippers, slippers! *He has fallen in love, by ——!*"

And he fell a-writhing in another spasm of unrestrainable hilarity.

The morning sun, by this time, had quite flooded the room. One after the other, the smutted candle-wicks flickered out in little puffs of malodorous smoke, sizzling each in the melted grease of its fouled socket. A tankard had upset. The contents spread slowly in a darker stain over the stained green cloth, blotting and thickening among the tobacco ash, trickling steadily down upon the polished floor.

"Mr. Rood," said Sir Francis in a hard voice, "you shall fight me for this."

"For what, exactly?"

"For a point of honor."

"Cheerfully," grinned the other, "and kill ye, too."

"That is as it may be!"

AT ONCE Sir Francis wheeled the light table off to one side beneath the mantel, pushed his own chair against the wall, and cleared a wide, circular space in the center of the floor. His every movement displayed the self-possession of practise. He walked silently to a standing press where his weapons hung, picked up his shoulder-sash of red velvet and Spanish leather, and unbuckled and unsheathed his body rapier. It was a long, slim ribbon of Italian steel, fluted, flexible and wicked-looking. In the bright sunlight it flashed like silver, where it did not gleam metallic like a bluish serpent. He bent it to an arc, permitting it to spring back, quivering, to the perpendicular, and turned on his heel to confront his antagonist.

The other had not stirred from his seat. He still lolled there watching him ironically.

"I am waiting," said Sir Francis.

"You seem in monstrous haste to die!"

"Are you so deadly a swordsman, then?" said Sir Francis impatiently.

"Oh, moderate, moderate," mocked the other. "Ye will have heard of me, no doubt, as I of you; though my fame is more local. But certes, were I clumsy as a scullion with a skewer—which I am not—ye would still stand no chance here."

"We bandy phrases. Will you fight, or no?"

"Yea, thou pinch o' nothing!" girded the other ferociously.

For all his huge bulk, he bounded from his chair like a panther, unsheathed his weapon, flung both his great arms apart to their full, immense width—all in one motion. His sinews stretched, cracking, out of their evening's lassitude. He towered a foot above Sir Francis' sleek-curled head.

His formidable hanger, straight, wedge-shaped, with its triangular presentation of three keen cutting-edges, gleamed a good two inches longer than his opponent's sinuous blade. A backward kick from his heavy foot hurled his seat crashing to the far end of the room.

"I will kill you! I will spit you like a rabbit!"

He tore off his coat for the first time in twelve hours, and crushed back the cuff of his right shirtsleeve. A corded arm like a ham bulged under the cambric.

Sir Francis shrugged indifferently. He passed a wisp of lace kerchief across his lips, saluted with all the punctilio of the fencing-school, and fell on guard.

"Have at you!"

The other's sword-arm shot forward, paused—dropped. Deliberately he flicked a fallen crum with his point, sending it spinning along the smooth floor toward the slender foot before him. So close a control he had of thick wrist and weighty weapon. A curious smile played over his vindictive features.

"A moment. What are we fighting for, my gallant?" he gibed. "Will ye enlighten me once more?"

"This is unprofitable questioning," responded Sir Francis in a deadly tone.

"A woman?"

"You might go to death, at least, like a gentleman!"

"Ye mean to kill me, then?"

"I shall kill you. You are a dead man. I shall run you through the body, a little above the left pap."

"So certain? Ye always keep your word?"

Sir Francis made no answer. He only turned his rear-flung left hand a little in air, advancing his attacking arm, his extended body significantly.

The one called Kit held unmoved.

"And the word ye pledged me but a minute since? Ye break it easily, then?"

The young cavalier frowned a little, bit his lip, and relaxed his posture. His point lowered.

"What do you insinuate?" he demanded.

"Insinuate!" The other laughed coarsely. "That's good. Ye passed me your oath; now ye gorge it down warm, like a greengrocer. Gentleman? Gentleman, quoth 'a. There's many complexions o' the word, but only one criterion. Gentlemen may drink, and may drab, and may dice, and still be gentlemen, stap me. But not if they splinter a nice point of honor. Ye'll find none, A.D. 1664, to agree that *that's* any of your thin-spun peccadillos. Damme, if I ought to fight with ye. Had I a lackey, I'd ought to dispatch him here to cane ye, instead!"

"Will't please you to explain this?" cried Sir Francis in cold anger.

"Did ye, or did ye not promise to step me aside to any of your baggages? Hey? I pick one that suits, and ye're all for the duello."

"She is as pure—. But enough of this miserable recrimination. On guard, sirrah. I want your loutish life for myself. You have been at me goading long enough."

"Pure, is she?—we'll let that pass. Though if so, why fear my attempt of her, egad? However, that's not the matter. Ye made me a promise. If by some miracle ye killed me, my silken paladin," his eyes gleamed in cruel confidence, "where were then the profit in your promise? Hey? Ye've considered that point, have ye?"

He laughed again as Sir Francis' face whitened with baffled rage. He had surmised his young court-bred. Ecod, his own notions of honor, Kit Rood, were extravagant enough; ticklish here and there with nice shades, quibbles and discriminations, as adjusted by the code duello. This offended against custom, that against propriety, t'other against accepted opinion. He himself for example, look'ee, had not drawn steel on his host, earlier in the passado, over drink and the dice. 'Twas not done. Curious, but he held such act unsanctioned.

Yet to go so far in consistency as this young flitter-my-toes—hardly. 'Twas notorious that the French fashion, now much in vogue in England, would have your true *gentilhomme* lie down supine and let ruin flow over him, for a holden promise; but, Lord! he had scarce expected to see the very lunacy capered in his presence, e'en though he had played for it! Why, Frank was an ass, egad!

For the young man had turned away on the instant, though not so quickly that his cynical adversary missed a glimpse of the tears that had sprung to his eyes.

"I must not kill you then, unfortunately," he said in a colorless voice, over his shoulder.

"Certain, ye'd have had old doing it!" commented the other contemptuously.

"But where are ye off to? Is there any reason why I must not kill *you*, however?"

Sir Francis whirled on his heel.

"This is intolerable. You are a poltroon, sirrah! You tie my hands and then bait me!"

"Not at all. I propose to tie your hands, and then cut your throat."

The powerful body began to curve stealthily, the left elbow to bend, the curled fingers of the left hand to creep slowly upward shoulder high. The right arm, with its weapon, began to lengthen, maneuvering, into position for attack.

"You mean murder, then?" cried Sir Francis incredulously. His involuntary grip tightened on his hilt.

"*Murder—an ugly term—an ugly term. 'Gin ye—here—kill me—ye're dishonored—my gentleman——*"

With nearly every whispered utterance came a groping movement of the long blade, feeling, feeling. There was something terrifying about the silent weapon with that huge bulk behind it. It seemed in itself a living thing almost, stirring of its own volition, endowed with its own malignant intelligence quite independent of the hand that guided it. It crawled ever forward, turning now to one side, now to the other, now right, now left, as seeking its forechosen, vulnerable spot. Sir Francis' rapier, as if distracted, turned the other's steel aside time and again.

"Mr. Rood, you are aware of what you do?"

"*Perfectly. 'Gin ye—here—kill me—ye're no less than—dishonored.*"

"Dishonored? And you?"

"*Oh, ye may—defend your skin.*" An implacable leer. "*There's nothing 'gainst that. And so this is—fair!*"

The last word burst forth with a violence as frightful as the lightning lunge which accompanied it. The whole brute strength of Rood's back, arm, and leg muscles seemed driven forward in it, overwhelming, like some blind force escaped from control. It seemed impossible that flesh and blood could withstand that headlong, rending shock and not fall pierced before it.

But Sir Francis did not fall. On the contrary. His flexible blade, engaging, appeared to wrap itself consciously about his adversary's steel. It hugged it. It rippled in a glint of blue metal along the whole other length from point to hilt. It seemed, in some incomprehensible manner, to suck away the very impetus from yon vicious, hissing thing. A moment it whirled, twisting, in a continuous spindle of arching, flashing ribbons that spun with incredible deftness, over, under, and around the straight sword lying there imprisoned and thwarted within its unbreakable mesh.

Suddenly Sir Francis jerked his effeminate wrist. The two blades shot apart. Sir Francis' own point darted forth and darted back like a snake's tongue. He himself retreated a light step or two. A red stain leaped to view on the white, thin cambric of the other's forearm. Rood bounded backward with an oath. Blood was dripping slowly over his knuckles. Heavy drops lengthened and began to creep sluggishly down his obliquely held blade.

"*Touché*," remarked Sir Francis.

His face had resumed its color and its wonted languidness of expression.

"Ye countered me!" said the other stupidly, still staring at his wounded arm. "Me!"

His opponent's sole reply was a monosyllable.

"'Gage," he uttered, gliding now into posture for the offensive.

The two weapons rang against each other.

FOR some little time there was audible no other sound in that room than the quick shuffle and stamp of practised feet, the sharp, menacing kiss or clash of the blades, the brief hiss, intermittent, of indrawn breaths. The big man moved to the deadly business more carefully now; and indeed, he seemed to carry death in his gift a hundred times hidden in tricks of innumerable schools. For all his great body, he padded swift and purposeful as a cat. Round and round the cleared space he led, watchfully probing for an opening. His long, ponderous hanger flickered like a bodkin in his grasp, now *tierce*, now *carte*, never reckless, always cautious, traversing, foining, lunging. Moments passed. Yet unaccountably, Sir Francis, slighter and more delicate, met him inevitably at every plan—whether at the *staccato*, the *montanto*, the *punto reverso*, the *passado*, the *hai*. The younger man played an offensive defense, with extraordinary knowledge. His action was cold-blooded, elegant, and precise. Beads of sweat began to gather on Rood's swarthy skin. Sweat trickled down into his eyes.

Presently Sir Francis, still fencing, addressed the other with elaborate politeness.

"It is wholly irregular at this moment," he said, skilfully parrying a lunge at his groin, "to talk. I crave your pardon for it. But then this whole duello is somewhat irregular. We have no seconds. I must conf—. Ah!——"

Again his rapier ran along the other's blade to the hilt, tugged lightly, and recovered its point. His opponent's sword sped out to meet a fatal thrust at mid-body. But Sir Francis had merely feinted. Swiftly the slim steel deflected upward, and ran Rood through the flesh of the cheek. Again blood followed the wound. And again the young rakehell retreated a step or two. He felt for his little lace kerchief.

"I must confess," he continued coolly, speaking through the bit of lace pressed against his mouth, "that you had befogged my common sense there for an instant, Mr. Rood. I believed that I could not *in honor* fight you. I am in the habit of paying a scrupulous attention, as you seem but too well aware, to all the supercilious dictates of a very captious *honor*. But since it appears that I may, *in honor*, defend myself, though not, *in honor*, put an end to you——"

"'Gage!" hoarsely broke in the other, maddened by repetition of the veiled slur.

He made forward impetuously. The short respite had been sufficient to give him second wind.

There was an intense exchange for an interval, neither giving an inch.

Imperceptibly—unmistakably, however—the grave advantage shifted.

"—an end to you," proceeded Sir Francis callously, now pressing his opponent backward, "I shall, in all *honor*, do myself the *honor* of teaching you the theory, by practise, of the Italian rapier its loveliest stroke—the *thrust*."

Term and stroke came delivered simultaneously. A feint, a cut-over, a thrust—and an inch of sharp steel protruded and flashed back through the outer curve of Rood's thick thigh. With the swift withdrawal, a thin seam of red at once sewed itself the whole length of the yellow knee-breech. A damp, shapeless spot appeared: the satin pasted and clung there.

The weapons flew together and engaged.

"I shall," resumed Sir Francis, always unerringly manipulating his light but tough rapier, "cut your sizable torso to ribbons with the—*thrust*. I shall blood you, dear my provincial Goliath, from your head which is high, to your foot which is huge, with the —*thrust*. I shall not again attempt your countenance with my—*thrust*. For I keep my word with my—*thrust*."

Thrust, thrust, thrust. Every sentence closed with that word, and each time the venomous action itself followed and suited it. Sir Francis played with his opponent. He dallied with him as with a novice. He made capital of his growing desperation and wildness. He had by this time pressed the other backward again, step by step, the whole circuit of the room. Rood, driven sharp against the dicing-table, crouched now at bay hard by the oak mantel, and under the little row of slippers that brazened it there above.

The big man's considerable skill had seemed to avail him less than if his sword had been of wood, and his arm artificial. Sir Francis had slashed the other's small-clothes to tatters, and now fell systematically to puncturing his vast expanse of muscle, his right hand, his forearm, his back, his wavering left hand, the calves of his legs, with innumerable stinging wounds, all painful, all streaming blood, yet none, not a single one, either fatal or disabling.

"Your life is safe from me, Mr. Rood. And your face is safe. I shall not mar your beauty with my—*thrust*. You shall try your charms if you will, and on what charmer you will. I shall step aside, as I said; but first, the—*thrust*——"

"—— you!" panted the other.

"—for which this is all preparation. Receive, tall my *maître d'escrime*, the following truths: First, a hanger like yours should bear a basket hilt to protect the right hand from injury. Second—but more momentous—of all weapons of steel, whether hanger, claymore, poignard, dagger, *maingauche*—the Italian rapier is the queen."

He whirled to right, and drove the other toward the center of the room.

"Third, mine is an Italian rapier. Fourth and final, of all rapier-strokes the prettiest effective is the—*thrust*. Fifth and ultimate, if I *could* be vanquished by dexterity—and I deprecate braggadocio—'twould be by the—*thrust*."

Here, the other ever defending himself desperately though vainly, Sir Francis began to move with more care though with

lightning speed, toward his inevitable finale:

"And in that contingency (a more—insinuating *thrust*—than mine) I have every assurance—that I can meet point—with point-and-edge—for I have mastered every—possible whim of the—*thrust!*"

There was an abrupt clatter of metal.

"Ye have done for me, you ——!"

A foul stream of vituperation burst from Rood's distorted mouth. His heavy hilt had dropped from his nerveless fingers. His sword lay on the floor.

Sir Francis had run him through the right forearm from wrist to elbow—disabling him.

"You should have skill also of the left hand."

"I will tear the heart out of ye for this!"

"You will not do it with your teeth?" Sir Francis negligently wiped his rapier with his lace kerchief. "My door is unlocked, Mr. Rood. You will not do me the *honor* again, I think?"

"I will have my revenge!"

"Not over my gaming-table."

"I will have your Puritan trollop away from ye!"

The young rakehell looked at him with narrowed eyes, then laughed shortly. What under heaven had possessed him, after all, into yon touching display of the virtues? The woman was nothing to him—his own blacksmith's wife. Impatience pricked him. Against Kit's mordant jeer, ås against his own exasperated sense of paradox in this breath of lofty conscience, his loose habit of thought revolted violently. If Kit proved slack-mouthed—and certes he might—there would be tittering o'er this business from here to Whitehall. He would face ridicule, demmit.

"Your words are oddly chosen after our little passage," he said coldly. "I must not kill you. I can not cane you—not I *you*. Doubtless you would prove more adept at brute fisticuffs."

The other gnashed his teeth.

"But will ye step me aside from Dorcas Craig!" he girded.

Sir Francis walked deliberately to the open window.

"Ajax!" he called. "Aj——"

The black face bobbed up with startling suddenness, the white, scared eyeballs still rolling.

"Saddle me Mr. Rood's stallion and bring it here."

"Aye, massa."

"Wait!" Sir Francis paused ominously. "Thou'st been spying, scoundrel!"

"No, no, massa, no."

"So? Anon with thee, dog. Off!"

"Your answer?" sneered Rood.

Sir Francis made no reply.

"Disdains to repeat his protestations," snarled Rood.

His quondam host regarded him unpleasantly, and opened his lips. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and, crossing to the standing presses, pointedly sheathed, buckled, and hung away his rapier in place. There came a stamping of hoofs from without.

Kit Rood shot a look of hate at the other's immaculate back, clenched his gashed fists, and, bending down, picked up his own futile weapon. He made sullenly toward the door, an ugly sight, all blood-spots, rags, and rage. Well he knew the figure he must cut. On the threshold he paused, and turned slowly for a second wicked stare.

"*Thrust*, is it? Ye're invulnerable? We shall see, Sir Susceptible. Ye vowed ye would step me aside from your Purit'y pretty— Curse me, if I believe ye!"

II

FOUR weeks passed.

Despite the lamentable rarity of piquant occurrences in the province, no word o' gossip had slipped out on the duello betwixt Sir Francis Vaux and Kit Rood the planter. A clash over a woman! and without seconds! 'Twould have made a tasty topic. But the two principals had kept mum; and the only other witness, black Ajax, shied from the matter with chattering teeth. His back was scarred with stripes for which no reason had been assigned when the overseer had been commanded to lay on. Ajax had been silenced to his fellow-slaves, thus quenching chatter from that quarter.

And yet tongues wagged furiously though discreetly in taverns and softer assemblies, on the new scandal that had set the province agog. Four persons were concerned in it—in special big Kit Rood. The other three were Sir Francis Vaux, Vaux's Puritan blacksmith, and Dorcas Craig, the sober smith's young wife. A merry matter, egad! David Adoniram—crop-eared name!

—had handled his more obvious intruder—Kit. Eh, how he had handled him! But of his own wider, spicier negligence, that touched his integrity so much more nearly, la, he was said to be quite ignorant.

Purblind he was, 'twas credibly averred, to what the whole world imputed—the culpability of his own profligate young lord o' the manor. He would have a pair of horns clapped on him. He stalked as deliciously true to form here, as any of your mad invented married asses in Etherege's theater. Momentarily, the rôle played by each of the four in yon comedy eclipsed the ordinary rumors of scattered Indian horrors, conspiracies 'gainst the tyrannous Governor, intrigues for political preferment, and such-like common topics.

The tale had taken wing from the moment when— But hold! The affair begs its proper beginning.

Amusements in His Majesty's Virginia, alas, were less various then, than in old London. Sure, one could dice, hunt, dance, horse-race, attend a cockfight—but Lud! One was in exile, after all. Your true excitement came but three or four times a year, with the arrival of the tall ships from England. Miss *that* sight?—'twas then that one pitied the felon in the stocks! When the distant masts were descried, word spread like wildfire. By the time the stately caravels sailed up the James and began to wear slowly toward the slip, the whole wharf was black with clustered forms.

Eagerness—a miserly term! Yon vessels meant hope, joy, life, death, comfort, drudgery, suspense, despair. 'Twas all in the intelligence they brought. Not only were they a link with home. The precious crop of tobacco that had gone forth upon one vessel—either it returned here upon another in form of all the heart desired, or else, dread tidings! here came word that it had never made its English port: that it had been blotted out; foundered in some storm at sea; fallen to rapacious pirates; floated in upon an evil market; been seized by factors for an outstanding debt.

Whatever had legs, bundled out to meet the incoming ships. 'Twas then that the white bond-servants, poor devils, were hard to hold at their thankless labor, chafing and muttering at their toil. The ships from home! Whole days before any such were expected, the town was crammed with folk from outlying plantations. All the ordinaries were filled to overflowing. A gala, in a sort, like the King, his birthday.

In a keen, swarming hour like that, it was, that Kit Rood limped out on the Jamestown wharf, again a sight so sorry and laughable, that he set the crowd buzzing.

"What's wrong, Kit?"

"What a-Gog's name hit you?"

"Mr. Rood, sir!"

But his only answer had been a curse.

"Death and the ——! Let me be!"

And he had violently shouldered and jabbed his way through the astounded press, and up the gang-plank to the deck of the vessel.

Yet he had not disappeared so quickly but half the gathering exclaimed over the charcoal-smudged, filthy, dripping state of his fashionable garments; while t'other half cried out on his puffed and swollen features, his rapidly purpling eyes, and the bleeding ear half-torn from his head. His broken scabbard had dangled at his side, with a jagged end of blade in it, still protruding.

"What happened to him, faith?"

"He has been manhandled!"

"Not big Kit Rood!"

"There's but one man i' the province could ha' done it!"

"But he—. Why, there's none soberer!"

And certes, pat to the action, like th' chorus in a Greek tragedy, who comes up just then, but Bully Sedley, laughing fit to choke.

"Have any on ye seen Kit Rood?" he cries.

He was immediately surrounded.

"What d'ye know?"

"Did ye see the brawl?"

"Did ye see it, Bully?"

"Why, his very sword was snapped like a lath!"

Sedley held his shaking sides.

"Did I see it? I was there every minute. Oh, Lud. 'Twas big sober-face did it, Adoniram Craig. Oh Gad, oh Gad!" He doubled up at the mere recollection. " 'Twas as good as a bear-fight!"

"Vaux's blacksmith! And to Kit! But we thought 'twas Sir Francis who——"

"So did I—and may be right at that. But it was Kit rode up, all prinked in his seductive finery— I was calling on Sir Francis; he's down with the quinsy; when hola! I behold Kit Rood. Now Kit's

been shunning the manor these four weeks past, for some strange reason. What's he doing here, I speculate. But he just grins at me, rides up to the blacksmith's cabin, dismounts, ties up his horse, and enters me the house as if he were the master."

"No!"

"Gad, I thought, that's bold. Aside from rumor o' Sir Francis—and *that* may be lies—there has been no breath uttered 'gainst Mistress Craig's good name. However, the affair was none of mine, and I make to ride on—when there comes a scream from the house."

"A scream, quotha? Come, that's brutal!"

"So is Kit," said Sedley contemptuously. He broke off to slap his thigh and fall to chuckling. "So is—ha! ha!—so is David Adoniram! I never admired yon frigid iceberg save that once."

"But what happened?"

"The door flies open, and out runs Mistress Craig, all dread and terror. Kit's hairy paw shoots out behind her, but she eludes him and makes straight for me. Egad, I climbed down quickly. We'll have no such doings in this colony!"

There came an ominous growl from the ever-thickening group. More than one pair of eyes turned instinctively toward the lively bevy of ladies yonder, to one side of the wharf, ensconced in their usual choice out of the jostling and pushing, and now waiting all agog for this thrilling history to be brought to them warm.

"I reach for my weapon"—Sedley paused apologetically—"I know he'd ha' made mincemeat of me. But yon slim wife went by me like a flash, and straight for her husband's smithy. 'Tis only a stone's-throw, as you know. David Adoniram met her before she had fled half-way. He had heard her scream."

He paused deliberately.

"Lord, Bully, none o' your cursed artistry!" cried one impatiently. "What took place then? What took place?"

"But Kit had his hanger!" exclaimed another.

"Why," laughed Sedley with enjoyment, "he never drew it. Like enough, he disliked to soil it on a common Puritan dog. We know he's vain as a bull of his muscles, and damnably confident of himself. And then the smith was unarmed—*hm*—and I was watching. 'Twas all over in two two's. I never saw such power. David Adoniram fell upon him and overwhelmed him, hip and thigh. His wife's the apple of his eye. He had Kit by the throat, and was shaking him like a huge rat. I thought he would kill him with bare hands. He buffeted him i' the face and nearly tore the ear from his head, when Kit, half-strangled, reached back for his blade after all——"

"But how came Kit so drenched, ha?"

"Mucked, he was—with grease, and soot, and water!"

"Why, he looked *drowned*."

Sedley thrust his tongue in his cheek, and went off into a little affected titter that all recognized.

"Bless you, there's the meat o' the jest for the double-minded! Why, Kit had begun to sputter under the other's arm. He was trying a muffled bellow, while wrenching at his hilt—something about Frank Vaux, perhaps. 'Twas then that David Adoniram heaved him up bodily and lugged him off into the smithy like an ant with a caterpillar. I followed—all expectation, as ye may imagine. Ecod, the sober crop-ear hath a cold wit and a mighty arm! He threw Kit upon's iron anvil there, and brutally jammed a leather knee down upon him!"

By this time Sedley's whole audience was in a ripple of mirth, both at the characteristic insinuation and the big planter's plight. The distant ladies peremptorily dispatched a small boy demanding instant enlightenment, which was hastily and discreetly given. Rood was a swaggerer, and cordially and widely feared.

"Anon? anon?"

"Anon?—" hooted Sedley. "Why, anon he seized a sledge and a chisel, and ruined me that famous hanger, scabbard and all! But last—oh, Lud!—he e'en picked him off like a horseshoe, and soused the hot gallant till over the eyebrows—*Sssss!*—in the big wooden muck vat where he tempers his metal! There's your grease! And your soot! And your water!"

There was a roar of laughter that must have wrung to the very hold of the anchored vessel. The inquisitive, tarry heads of sailors popped out at ports and above the high bulwarks. A general movement began in the direction of the ladies.

"But why didn't he turn tail for home then?" cried old Beauchamp, scarlet-faced. His white hair stuck all awry, what with mopping for heat and for merriment.

"Why rush hotfoot to face our quizzing?"

"Lord, I don't know. He relied on's reputation, probably!"

"Not altogether," responded a Scotch tobacco factor who had been first on board. "Why, yonder ship is the *Dolphin* herself, now two months delayed, with his whole last year's venture bound up in her. Would he absent himself from that? He owes rather widely on his leaf, what with gaming, and one thing and t'other. And I may tell you in confidence, gentlemen, his news is not good."

A whisper ran round.

"If that's the case," said Sedley thoughtfully," I feel no shame, gentlemen, in saying that I would rather not face him now."

He turned and walked away in the direction where he had left his horse tethered. The group thinned. The quieter-minded, and those who still had business on the wharf, moved discreetly to a less conspicuous coign of observation.

"Kit's an ugly man to thwart."

"A shrewd man," observed the factor soberly, "if he but kept steadier habits."

"Young Sir Francis might match him thrusts," chuckled old Beauchamp; "but lately Kit seems to shun him."

"Shun Sir Francis?" said the factor sharply, looking up.

"Ay, it has been noticed."

"Hm—m."

The factor frowned a little, and tapped his thumbnail musingly against his teeth. He stared out over the James, flicked a bit of lint from his cuff, and walked over to a bale of merchandise that lay on the wharf. He examined it idly. Then he turned back and put his arm through old Beauchamp's.

"I wonder whether I can have a word with you, Mr. Beauchamp," he said.

"Surely."

They stepped aside.

"I'll straight to the point," said the factor. "You know I am Sir Francis Vaux's man of business, Mr. Beauchamp. He is one of my clients, as his father was not."

"Yes?"

"Now I have— Well, the thing must be said."

He broke off abruptly.

"'Gainst Frank?" Old Beauchamp was for withdrawing his arm.

"No, no," said the other hurriedly. "I can not afford to set up as a censor. But 'tis quite the contrary. Some one must warn him."

"Warn him? Warn him of what?"

"You will be circumspect?"

"Lord, yes; but what's all this mystery? Warn him of whom?"

"Of Mr. Rood."

"Nonsense! Frank will make two of him, and half his size!"

"A moment, if you will be patient. Now I have had certain dealings with Mr. Rood— No matter. But he is not accurately appraised in this province. He is only half-known when reported a swaggerer, a duellist, a mauler of common folk. I have reason to know him, sir, as the cunningest, shrewdest human devil——"

Old Beauchamp stared amazement, as the self-contained Scot spat violently to one side.

"Kit Rood?" he cried, incredulous. "That boar?"

"Mr. Beauchamp," said the other significantly, "will you undertake to warranty every 'scutcheon in the province?"

"No, but——"

"He is the shrewdest, cunningest devil in the world. What he can not gain straight, he will nip evil-crooked. He has not been withstood heretofore, true. Oh, I know his repute of a word and a blow; but——"

He bent over and whispered in the other's ear—

"What! Not wi' those bloody-minded——"

The factor clapped a palm over the open mouth.

"For —— sake, man, I have not the evidence. And that's not the matter here."

"The unspeakable hound!"

"Sir, when he can not call out his man, he grins friendship on him and ruins him But when he shuns him, why, he dreads him. God help that man then. You said he avoids Sir Francis, for some reason. 'Twas that had made me speak to you."

"But what would ye have me do?"

"Speak to Sir Francis."

"Why not speak to him yourself?"

"No, no; he'd have a contempt of me. I am but his factor. Now you are in his close company, I learn, more frequently even than any of the younger gallants."

"Gad, yes," said old Beauchamp ruefully, "to the tune of some hundreds of tobacco. I'm *Falstaff* to him, a reprobate, stap me, for all my white hairs. But what shall I tell him?"

"Warn him of an ambuscade, warn him of a knife in the back, warn him of a kidnaping, warn him of a walking afoot. And yet— 'Twould likely be none o' those. In any case, if there *is* a happening we will know where to seek the cause; and I'll have laid an information."

"Yonder he comes!"

"Sir Francis?"

"Rood!"

And certes, there came the subject of the conversation himself, down the gang-plank. He had furbished up a-somehow from the stores of the vessel, being known to the sailing-master. A poultice was stuck over his ear. Seeing the two with their heads together, he walked straight toward them, grinning sourly.

"Your servant," he said bowing, "friends of my friends."

"Eh?" quizzed old Beauchamp. "Which ones?"

"Why, those who got me *these*," replied Kit Rood ironically, touching his bruises.

"Meaning?"

"Oh, ye'll have heard the ballad by now," growled the other; "but maybe not the whole truth on it, nor who had persuaded me toward the jade i' the first place, swearing to step me aside from her."

His two listeners were silent.

"Anon, curse me, have ye no questions? Ye'd ought to be interested; you, Mr. Beauchamp; and you, ye ——, long-nosed Sawney Scotsman!"

"You'll have mistaken gossip for fact, Kit," condoled old Beauchamp slyly. "Too bad. There's nothing known 'gainst the good young woman."

"There's not, hey? Ye'll maybe think so, when I tell ye what I know."

The two exchanged a glance. 'Twas plain they thought his statement a mere thwarted jealousy oozing into speech.

"What d'ye know?"

"Ah, ye old Mahometan!" Kit leered distortedly with all his swollen face. "Ye would outstrip the gazettes themselves for a spicy scandal! Well, here's one for ye. Gape at it. Laugh at it. Spread it out in the taverns. Our languid Frank, our rakehelly, notorious profligate young Sir Francis o' the gathered slippers—. How many trophies has he? You'd ought to know. They're uncounted on his oak mantel. *He is fallen in love, by ——! in high, holy and virtuous!—and wi' his own* cropeared, common blacksmith's bed-fellow!"

He thrust his head forward for the expected burst of laughter.

"Indeed?" politely commented old Beauchamp.

Kit looked from one man to the other. Their expression was not only unfriendly but maddeningly indifferent.

"Do ye understand me the jest?" he demanded. "Are ye dull, ha? 'Tis the rake himself, fallen into the incredible snare! He's in a dotage of morality, I tell ye! He! *Sir Francis Vaux!* In a pious ecstasy of lofty, sentimental, shrinking reverence toward a petticoat, no less! and a common kitchen stuff at that!"

"Do ye tell me," murmured old Beauchamp.

The factor's face was impassive.

Both listeners had seemed to dismiss this vicious nine days' wonder as invented out of hand; an impossibility too extravagant even to consider.

"Ye doubt me?" cried Kit wickedly. "Why, damme, I'll make him a laughing-stock if I writhe myself for it! He fought me an unwitnessed duello over her, hear me, and worsted me at it! Would I tell ye *that* for a fable? He promised to step me aside, the mincing conqueror! to any of his trollops; bantered me, he did; vowed to lend me his good offices, curse him, in any direction I pleased. And when I demanded to Dorcas Craig—he grew white as a dish-rag and scarlet as a beet. Whipped me out his rapier over her mere mention, —— him, and then worsted me in the encounter! 'Twas when he and I gamed there at the dice, in his manor, the second night running, four weeks ago!"

The two men stared at him, and became aware of the freshly healed scar on his cheek.

"Ye're staring at that, are ye? He did it that night!"

Old Beauchamp pursed up his lips to a long whistle, almost as Kit himself had done upon that first astounding revelation. Glittering Frank Vaux? In spite of himself, a foolish smile appeared on the old gentleman's face.

"Gad," he said, "that would be queerish."

"And I'll tell ye something else that's not for your ear alone," exclaimed Kit furiously. "Ye'll never make me believe that yon woman repulsed me as distasteful.

Not me! And sure, 'tis not her sooty, crop-eared blacksmith she loves, forty-odd years old! a sour-ball! that 'prisons her in his hut like a bond-servant! Vaux swore he'd step me aside from her. But did he? His new delicate miracle splintered under the strain! He warned her against me, —— him! When I came in through her door, I thought she was coy. But she ran out screaming——"

He fell a-cursing and swearing till he was all but inarticulate with rage.

"Tut, tut," said old Beauchamp, convinced now almost wholly of what the factor had told him. "Well, we must be going, Kit. Good-day to you."

"Eh? *Good* day."

Kit controlled himself with a curious effortlessness, and raised his hand to his mangled ear. His poultice had shifted somewhat. Blood was trickling down his cheek. He gazed round him; the entire wharf seemed to have overheard him, women as well as men. Indeed, he had been shouting into a careful silence. He looked toward the retreating backs of old Beauchamp and the factor.

"Ye'll not tell of it, what?" he muttered to himself after them. "Not you two? Well then, others will, split me, if my lungs here have proved efficient enough!"

And he turned slowly off the wharf toward a tavern.

He had solved the difficulty of spreading his ridicule without too much initial discomfort to himself. Yon two were Vaux's dogs, sworn to their young fop's interests. He had allowed himself to be betrayed to them, as it were, in an outburst of feeling where his involuntary voice had carried. Not bad. Vaux would be unpleasantly twitted with the affair from one end of Virginia to the other. And if he really loved her? Gad, how it would hurt! He would wriggle under it!

But Kit was by no means done with his revenges.

III

A STRANGE, almost a foreign figure in yonder lively cavalier colony, was David Adoniram Craig, who had so roughly asserted his manhood against trespass of his hearth.

But a still stranger figure was his young wife, Dorcas.

Both were Puritans. In vivid Virginia that was extraordinary enough. Folk of their uncomfortably repressive kidney had been driven from the province times without number, for in the new land ease was everywhere the overwhelming, common craving, whether in pretty manners, silken lavishness, seductive scents, or full-blooded oaths. It was the fashion. It was a natural reaction, in a sort, against that grim obsession which had fomented such mischief under pimple-faced Cromwell.

Floating lovelocks tied with sweeting-ribbon flaunted even from among the stateliest. To flirt, to sip Madeira, to make a good hand at cards, were held as essential to proper living as planting tobacco, perusing the poets, or displaying a well-turned grace at the ball. Your raggedest gaol-bird leering through bars, your very African chattels, were all for sporting a scrap of tawdry finery, or sticking a cast-off streamer here and there in their wool.

But whereas David Adoniram's somber garments, his rigidity, his severe cropped head, his fanatic prejudices, drew good-humored derision from the gentry, and mild sniggers and cat-calls from the riff-raff, young Dorcas Craig never failed to arouse wonderment amounting to amazement, whenever she appeared in thronging Jamestown streets—and 'odds seldom that was!—tripping at her husband's side.

She was a puzzle. She belonged in silks, egad, and wore linsey-woolsey. She might have adorned a palace, yet seemed all-contented in a rudest blacksmith-cabin. Dorcas; how came she by that demure name or in that stern wedlock? Your Priscillas, and Faiths, and Prudences were ever ungainly females. Their lines matched the frigid breed with whom they always mated.

But this mysterious alien had an odd, swaying grace in her walk, that looked almost a mockery within her unlovely sagging dress. Whiles, it was noted, she stepped composedly enough; yet, when startled, she was wont to flash a trick of arch, sidewise head-turning, unconscious, that seemed all but a meant beck and invitation.

Her lissom body, her alluring face, her piling mass of bronze-gold hair, her bewitchingly deep brown eyes that blended so unusually with the filmy, burnished strands irrepressible under her close coif, her shapely feet, her slim ankles, the slender, tapering white fingers of her tiny hands—all her

multitudinous beauties, whether obvious or surmised—spoke eloquently of the one divine, unmistakable, intoxicating temperament. She was made to be gallantly, passionately loved; to sparkle in a firmament of elegance and courtliness; to be the toast of connoisseurs in feminine charm. Seen in a ducal chariot in London, and adequately gowned, she would have created a sensation.

Yet here she was, in raw exile; nay, even in a narrower withdrawal of exile *within* exile, and apparently of her own willing choice. Venus a Puritan! Nell Gwynn a devout professor! What was it that sage rascal Comus contended?

> Coarse complexions,
> And cheeks of sorry grain, will serve to ply
> The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool.
> What needs a vermeil-tinctured lip for that?

How potent the gloom of a religion that could huddle yon treasure of hair under a frigid white mutch; yon willowy form within an ugly kirtle; could clap square-toed clogs wi' steel buckles upon those dainty-arched feet; and keep those matchless hands unringed and smudging in kitchen-messes!

Dorcas had no feminine friends, made no visits, received few callers. She even attended no church, for there was none of her persuasion nearer than Delaware. Were the other houses of worship really idolatry to her? It was not uncommonly otherwise rumored. But the little cabin on young Sir Francis' plantation, where she dwelt with grim David Adoniram, lay well off the beaten track.

Day after day she moved around in it and about her household duties, or sate sewing in her doorway, or took sedate walks with her husband, Sabbath afternoons, if the weather permitted. Even when ships from England were sighted, and the Jamestown wharf held all who could come away, she kept as close at home as David Adoniram himself, though some did say not over-contentedly.

Did she love her austere blacksmith? Kit Rood was not the only one in the colony who deemed that impossible of belief. David Adoniram repelled provincial friendships for his wife as for himself. But on rare occasions some of the gentry, caught in a sudden downpour, or hampered by a cast horseshoe, had sought the shelter of the mysterious cabin perforce. At such times, Dorcas Craig, removed, as it were, from the shadow of her husband, had displayed a shy whimsicality, a hint of wit and culture, quite startling amid those severe surroundings and from one of her garb.

What under the sun had been her antecedents in England? *Craig*—a Scotch name. But that told nothing; it was her husband's. Dorcas or no Dorcas, the woman was sprung quite evidently of gentle stock. And David Adoniram—Why, the man was a bogey to frighten children with; the very personification, la, of intolerance and stiff-necked bigotry. *He* had no relapses into culture, and made no concealment of the fact.

It was comically known and everywhere, that to him the three popular *D's*, drink, dice and dancing, were alike Babylon and scarlet damnation, and lumped in one with the Episcopal church-house, the coursing of horses, the infrequent Catholic manifestations, the ambiguous gala days, and the notoriously innocent Maypole prancings and fooleries.

The apparitions of David Adoniram upon the swarming public streets of the port were most infrequent. And the ironic attention they aroused could scarcely have failed of unpleasant effect on his young wife, as she clung to his arm, while he strode through the gay, tittering press like some iron being from a harsher, more fanatic world.

But that David Adoniram loved *her* was never for a moment brought in question. True, Dorcas' amazingly physical attractiveness accorded ill with those drab outward signs of inner grace by which one of your yea-forsooth apostles should have chosen a helpmeet. Knowing winks attested the common opinion of yon roundhead's stubborn hypocrisy. Eh, he was no holier than those he frowned upon. But that he loved this wonderful wife of his—If such a sour giant could be said to love, and such a provokingly demure nymph to be satisfied with such love—why, the twain were impeccably matched.

David Adoniram never willingly let Dorcas out of his sight. He found fifty excuses to come away from his toil and into the cabin during the day, merely to feast his eyes on her trim form, as she moved deftly about her housework. He drew water, split kindling, and even hung the

iron pot on the crane for her, despite his inbred conviction that all housework, e'en though heavy work, was solely woman's work. He obeyed her slightest behest with an awkward speed that might have been laughable, if it had not been so warmly earnest.

In that loose colony, and fully aware of his own isolation, his wife's incongruous beauty, and the subtle enticements that might jeopardize his happiness, he watched over Dorcas with an icy fierceness that had hitherto kept e'en the skilfullest of gallants at uneasy miles'-length.

And yet never for a moment did he dream of distrusting *her*. Had the thought even remotely entered his mind that she might deem his constant presence a surveillance, he would have fallen into hopeless, helpless agony. She was his vision, his New Jerusalem, as he secretly dared name her to himself in guilty, self-conscious moments resolutely repressed.

He was but sheltering her still, body and soul, against those accursed, ever-present, gaudy malignants, as on that old day in Scotland, four years before, when he had swung her, terrified and clinging to his arm, up upon his stirrup, up upon his saddle, close-pressed against his heart—and away, with the good horse powerfully rising and falling under them, and Monk's traitor dragoons racing avidly behind.

Well he recalled that bitter, thrilling scene. At moments when a hatred for this savage and wanton land obsessed him, he saw again, across the waving Virginia fields, the pitchy black smoke, the lurid tongues of flame billowing and licking upward from the roof of his own lost lowland home, as from Dorcas' father's adjacent mansion. Screams and oaths, the crackling of fire and the clashing of steel, had been the first hint of that horrid inbreaking on five years of peace. Turmoil, hubbub, a Satan's hue and cry. He had instantly run out on the cobbles from his armorer's-shop. What was this? What was this?

Royal cockades, by the stern Jehovah! To your tents, O Israel! Atheists again upon the godly fold!

Back indoors he had leaped. He had snatched from its wall his broad claymore, his sainted father's sword. Yea, it had cloven to earth just such lewd, filthy malignants at Naseby and at Marston Moor. And now forth again! Once more into battle for the Lord! Yon could be no wider than a foray, than a viperish raid from the idolatrous mountain clans. There were brethren to be leaned on, resistance to be organized. At desperate worst, there was relief to be stubbornly awaited, whilst a cry for help slipped away to the Parliament troops quartered i' the neighboring town.

But he had been met by the panic-stricken press of his own townsfolk fleeing into the woods. There had been old sabers of his own Ironsides Company crying out heart-rendingly even amongst the foremost of them:

"Cromwell is dead! His son is abjured!"

"Wo! Wo!"

"Ichabod, the glory is departed!"

"We are given over into the hands of the Gentiles!"

And that had been David Adoniram's first intimation of the incredible news that another Charles had landed on English soil and gripped the chosen country again for the rapacious Stuarts. Slow roads, slug news. Nine months had crawled by with Israel fallen into mourning, ay, into abomination, and no one voice in all the wilderness to cry warning to him there in his remote withdrawal.

Dazed he had been. Of what that meant to *him*, to —— ——, as he then called himself, if he even so much as lurked anywhere within the vicinage of England or Scotland after this, he was terribly aware. Others might obtain amnesty for deeds against the Crown. But not such as he. Not such as he, nor such as Dorcas' father. A cruel death was the least *they* two could dream to hope for—torture, derision, desecration.

Regicides!

The word had sprung again into its vanished, dreadful significance. Men who had put to death their King! At one stroke, eleven years had there been annihilated. The righteous Eighty, from Cromwell down to —— ——, might never have sate in judgment in Westminster Hall. The royal perfumed Amalekite himself might there be risen again from the dead.

Regicides—he, Dorcas' father! Men who had helped slay the Antichrist himself, the king-serpent Charles the Stuart, could hardly expect mercy from his venomous, revengeful brood now come so evidently into terrible power!

There had been but one recourse—a secret flight into Holland. He had known good ways and means. He had been alone and unhampered; his mother dead this twelvemonth, his father under sod these three lusters, fallen in stern joy upon Marston Moor.

Marston Moor! a day and name he would remember even unto his own death! Eh, how they had whirled into battle there, the thundering psalm on their lips, he, —— ——, a boy then of twenty, together with great Cromwell and the Ironsides.

Let God now arise, and let His enemies be scattered!

He had taken the very claymore he held in his hand upon that field from the stiffening fingers of his father; and had wielded it himself, thereafter, at Newberry, Naseby, Dunbar——

Flight into Holland—alone? What of Dorcas's father? What of that brother in the spirit closer than any brother of the flesh, who had strode shoulder to shoulder with him in the fiery days; who had abjured gentility, family, inheritance, cleaving to God's saints and striking a grim blow for righteousness? Could he leave him there to seizure? One alone would be safer; two together would draw danger; but it was *he* that knew the ways and means, David Adoniram. Desert the father of the little maid he had dandled on his knee? Abandon him to the inevitable anguish of the rack, the wheel, and abomination unspeakable?

Gripping his sword, he had stolen by back alleys toward Dorcas' father's mansion. The headlong flight swarmed all the other way.

A blaze!

His own home! Dorcas' father's! The sparks, the red glare shot forth from both. *The regicides' kennels* had been put first to the torch. God give he had come in time to hurry his brother——

Ah! A struggle at an upper window; a crash of shattered glass; a body flung horridly to the pointed cobbles below.

Too late—Dorcas' father. At least he had died swiftly.

In stealthy haste David Adoniram had turned to be gone. Time pressed. His mind was crowded now with only his own jeopardy. But a door burst open in the familiar mansion. A slim figure darted out, disheveled, terror-stricken.

Dorcas!

Had she not fled with yon women and children?

But there had been no space for further thought. A burly form had showed behind her, with a red, wet sword, still dripping. She had reached the open street. She was winning, somehow, to safety. Like lightning David Adoniram shifted all his own plans. He knew just where and how he would intercept her; at the blind lane; behind the draper's shop; he would take *her* with him. But on the instant, a leering, salacious figure on horseback swept up the empty street and toward her, and a uniformed arm, a greedy hand reached down as the horse was curbed cruelly. Dorcas shrank away, screaming——

No time to be lost. David Adoniram had sprung forward in a fury, casting pitiful prudence to the winds. And yet his brain had been sharp as an edge, clear as spring-water. To clutch the bridle with the left hand, to leap upon the horse's back, kill the dragoon and hurl his o'erbalanced carcass from the saddle to the earth, to swing Dorcas up before him, and away, had been the work of a twinkling.

God Himself had seen to it that yon horse had been a noble beast. In open country, his own country, they had never caught up with him. And once he had reached the dense woods and turned the steed loose, the malignants could never have found either him or the lass, if they had snuffled every bush and grass-blade with beagles.

THEN the flight. They two had lain close-concealed at a house he knew of. The owner, long suspected of being secretly Popish, was yet unaccountably humane. He had helped them with money, garments and provisions. Later, in Dumfries, where they had hidden for a time among friends, a godly minister had joined Dorcas and him in wedlock, making them man and wife. The step had been gravely urged upon them by more than one; and indeed, he himself had been much troubled those days, at the righteousness of being so constantly alone with a young maid, unmarried, as circumstances would necessarily constrain upon them two. Yet he had been soberly aware of their great difference in age. Even thus early Dorcas had been uncommonly attractive

in the flesh; less straitly reared, more given to worldly joys, profane reading and the like, than might have been expected from the daughter of such as her father.

God knows he had been honest with her. He had turned to her steadfastly then, and had said—well he remembered the words—

"Dorcas, there may be no need for this. Indeed, there *is* no need. I will leave you here among these good people, and later you will find your way to your father's kin or to your mother's family. They are not Christians. That is a misfortune. But you are own flesh and blood to them, and they will surely take you in."

But she had turned to him with streaming eyes; she had hung upon him, sobbing brokenly:

"You are my father, you are my mother. Take me with you!"

And so they had been married.

From Dumfries they had taken ship upon the Nith River, and out through Solway Firth along the Irish Sea to Bristol. For the projected flight into Holland had had to be given up, news having come that all shipping for Holland was being jealously scanned. At Bristol they had embarked on a caravel bound for the Americas.

Often he recalled how he had considered paying for their passage in an assumed name, even as of old Abram and Sarai in Egypt. Under an assumed name, verily, the malignants would have been seeking him. Would the besotted Amalekites dream of transfixing *the*—in any—? Nevertheless he had held the ruse too subtle; and it was under quite another than his own baptismal name, therefore, that he and his young wife had gone on board.

Again, being forced away from tolerant Holland, he had at first meant to make for Massachusetts, that distant communion of similar-minded, godly brethren. Yonder, surely, to one persecuted for God's sake, lay renewed hope of life and worship in the decorum of Jehovah's true meeting-houses. But a chance encounter had cried caution, giving him pause.

He had met two other regicides, Whalley and Goffe, who were then for escaping overseas to Boston, under the names of Richardson and Stephenson. And he had been stricken with anguish both for them as for his own young wife and himself. If not to Holland, then to Massachusetts! Yea, yonder, indeed, the blood-lust would be loosed upon them in full hue and cry. Yonder, if anywhere, the Stuart warrants would be dispatched to seek them out!

In a humble tailor's house, in Bristol, he had pleaded with them for their lives. But they had been obdurate, both, and had left for London to take ship for Massachusetts. What later became of them, he had never learned. He himself, with Dorcas, lay a whole year in Bristol, keeping in strict privacy from all but a very few. He had worked off and on, at blacksmithing, both in order to husband his borrowed moneys, and to keep from sinful despondency while waiting for Providence to point the safe course away from England. Not in vain had his father bred him from his youth to be a skilled armorer and swordsmith.

Horrid news had trickled to his ear, from time to time, as he lived in hiding, of Regicide Harrison baited by the mob at Charing Cross, hanged by the neck, cut down whilst yet alive, and tortured with the most hideous cruelty till the moment when his still palpitating heart was held up to the view of a thousand human beasts; of Regicide John Carew served in the same manner; of Regicide Lawyer Coke faced, upon the death sledge, with the ghastly head of Harrison aloft upon a pike; of the graves of Cromwell, Ireton and Bradshaw desecrated, their moldering bodies dragged in chains about the common streets, and finally hanged upon a triple tree till sunset, when they were taken down and beheaded.

David Adoniram had beaten his burning temples with clenched fists at every new whispered horror, groaning aloud. But for the futility of it, and the canon against self-slaughter, and the responsibility for Dorcas that he had undertaken, he would have rushed out into the streets proclaiming his name and crying down the vengeance of God upon yon fiends.

At last, however, the Merciful Will had guided a stanch ship with a discreet sailing-master into Bristol Port, as bound for the Virginias. And he and Dorcas had gone on board.

Was it to be wondered at that he loved this young wife of his, whose life had been welded to his own in the glare of such extraordinary, intimate events? That he watched over her with such fanatic zeal? That he trusted her like the very Word of God?

Ah, if only—. But no. Unfortunately,

fruit of the womb had been denied them; otherwise much, much might have turned out differently.

IV

NO LIVING soul can pass through the furnace without being seared and the very scars fixed. Once landed in Virginia, David Adoniram's gloomy figure had immediately earned him a score of jeering appellations—roundhead, crop-ear, prick-ear, death's-head, iceberg; and no one of them less derisive than the others. The Indians' name for him lay closest to the life, perhaps.

The savages always spoke of him as The-Man-Whose-Face-Is-Flint.

That in all the three years of his sojourn, and even to the violent end of the chapter, he was never identified nor seized as a regicide, is remarkable. But his calculation had proved infallible. His very openness, aye, his bold choice of harborage among the enemy themselves, had built his strong safety. From the first he had stepped forth as a Puritan and a David Adoniram Craig, making no concealment of those facts.

For what a pox *he* did there in that easy land, would have been difficult to explain. He belonged more northerly, faith, among the holier vessels. When he had been newly clapped eyes on, it had, indeed, been wondered if he had some deed o' darkness to conceal that he had wished to bury here in the Americas. One asked no uneasy questions; but sure, there were many such then in Virginia. It used to be noticed he never showed himself in the port, the first year of his stay. What might *he* have committed in England, ha? Of what crime have been attainted? There had been guesses many and various.

He had not shipped in as an indentured servant. He had an incongruously lovely young wife. But since no warrant had ever come over after him, and no description even remotely applicable had ever arrived in the usual runagate handbills, David Adoniram had presently come to be accepted as a paradox of the colonial landscape. A Puritan in Virginia—delicious. That sour jaundiced presence became all but indispensable after a time. It unwillingly added the one spice of contrast to vivid life about the Chesapeake.

Psalms, hymn-tunes, nasal mewlings: they whined dolefully above the clink of his anvil, it was declared, and even from his very cabin window of a Sunday morning. 'Twas as good as a comedy to behold the man draw righteous skirts aside, so to speak, from the lewd general contamination. Oh, he put forth no preachments; but his mere cold glare in public was unmistakable. He dwelt there in the tents of Kedar, la!

Certes, however, David Adoniram's stern features, his silent, implacable disapproval of the lively life around him, might have provoked ruder than jeers, but for three factors. First, he had from the very beginning moved within the powerful protection of Sir George Vaux, the sub-grantor, young Francis' father, now dead. For skilled artisans were desperately scarce in the colony, and yon roundhead was a marvellous deft smith and blade-maker. Secondly—*hm*—little Dorcas' provoking, demure beauty had invested her husband, and quite unknown to *him*, with a sort of unenviable sacredness.

From silken gentleman down to grinning rascal, no one two-legged man of all those abroad there would have wished to show overt harshness to the smith. For Dorcas, though no breath o' scandal was any way known against her, seemed yet in so far the essence of bodily witchery, that she, beyond all other women in the province, was most widely and futilely desired. And David Adoniram was her husband, after all, on whom she seemed to dote still. He was therefore—or is this unclear?—an embodied, impossible promise, somehow, of future access to *her* intimacy, and by no means to be manhandled.

Derisive names, aye; such-like might fashion the pretty's pretty vision more palatably. But maltreatment out and out— Where women fall prone to pity, look'ee— And in any case, Dorcas' distaste dared scarcely be risked.

Thirdly, and perhaps most conclusively, David Adoniram's own great form and threatening austerity forbade personal violence. For he had established respect for his heavy hand, and of his own accord, quite three years before.

The incident had befallen when he was new come to the province. He had but barely set foot from the vessel's gang-plank upon Virginia soil, when a strapping butcher's lout, ogling him and Dorcas, had offered indecent reference to the child-wife

shrinking and trembling at her tall husband's side.

Upon the spot, David Adoniram had seized the ruffian by the scruff of the neck. Pest! He had so shaken and slapped the huge fellow dizzy, flinging him sprawling to the wharf like a straw-man, that reputation had spread from the moment. Fair play is English. Yon crop-eared novelty, 'twas whispered, would be best let alone!

Old Sir George Vaux had been one of the witnesses of that tumble; and egad, but he had mightily liked the manner of it.

"And where are *you* for?" he had demanded. "Indentured? A bond-servant?"

"No." David Adoniram had been chary of words. "Passengers."

Sir George had looked him up and down, taking in his sober habit, and giving a sharp glance also to his wife.

"There are none of your persuasion in this colony."

The Puritan had made no reply.

"Anon!" Sir George had cried testily. "I'm offering to help ye! Where are ye for? What can ye do? Farm is it? hand-labor? Ye look a strapping fellow enough!"

God's doing.

"I am a good blacksmith, if you like."

At that others had eagerly pressed forward to the bidding.

"Done with you!" Sir George had called first, however. "My plantations need just such as you. Will ye take service with me, then?"

David Adoniram had hesitated.

"Would we, would my wife and I— Would we house far from town?" he had slowly asked.

"Pish—" The old gentleman had seemed disappointed. "My manor lies a goodish bit distant, I must say."

Indeed, nearness to Jamestown was a sought advantage among all classes those days, and especially bargained for among those hiring out as servants. Upon the word, others there had quickly offered closer locations, which David Adoniram, with a sidewise look toward his young wife, had seemed to consider.

"I will go with you, Mr. ——"

"Sir George Vaux!"

"I will go with you, Sir George," he had said finally however, without vouchsafing further explanation.

"And what may I call *you*, my man?" the old gentleman had asked indifferently enough, after they three had left the wharf behind them.

"My name is David Adoniram Craig," the smith had said firmly.

That was three years before. So carefully had the regicide cautioned his young wife, that even she, and even when they were alone, never called him other than *David*. It soon grew second nature and instinctive.

His master was a Catholic, as David Adoniram presently discovered. It seemed his fate, as he thought gloomily more than once, to find his refuge at the very hands of Rome, rather than amongst his more Protestant fellows.

NOW he was blacksmith and blademaker, both, upon the son's, young Sir Francis' lands, in the year of grace 1664. Not infrequently, in the past twelvemonth, he had grown sick with longing for the heat of his own inherited master-forge, whilst his very sweat had seemed to splash down more sourly upon this new owner's anvil. He had grown all but resigned and fixed in his exile, when the fresh lord of the manor came sailing home from England upon tidings of Sir George's death, a year before these happenings. And almost at once tribulations had set in, slowly chafing and angering him.

Young Sir Francis had never seen his smith, having left for France two years before the man had set foot in the colony. At first, when the young cavalier had beheld that detested Puritan garb and manner, he had been all for dismissing the dog unceremoniously. Sir Francis had brought over with him something more than his little row of glittering slippers. He had brought with him an aversion amounting almost to nausea for anything that smacked of roundhead hypocrisy. Certain, one reared in Charles II his court, could have been expected to feel no otherwise.

But old Beauchamp, his dead father's friend, with whom he had been vastly taken from the beginning, had strongly dissuaded him from the step. So had his new-chosen Scotch factor. 'Twould be ill-advised, they had counseled. A skilled blacksmith was priceless in this raw country. This was not like England where one could draw from an eager swarm. Here each plantation was a kingdom in itself, as it were, with its own mechanics, carpenters, coopers, and the like, of whom there was a vexing enough

lack in the colony. If he let the man go—. Sir Francis had hesitated. David Adoniram had been an impassive witness of his evident, contemptuous distaste.

Then the young cavalier had beheld Dorcas. Now a pretty woman, to one exiled from the spirited assemblies at Whitehall, was no unwelcome sight upon's own secluded estate. Cant, quotha? Eh, eh, what have nymphs to do with dogma?

The thing must be said. For 'twas that gave rise, not long after, though David Adoniram was then ignorant of it, to the smiles and gossip, and finally to the whole horror of the extraordinary, unawaited outcome. And Dorcas was startlingly more than pretty.

Sir Francis had but cast one glance at the slim, graceful form, the radiant hair all but hidden under the white coif, the demure face with its marvelous color, its fine, deep brown eyes that seemed so wistful as the young thing stood half-concealed in her cabin doorway.

"Who is that?" he had said languidly behind a perfunctory hand to his factor. "His daughter?"

"His wife!"

"Indeed?"

And he had left the modest household undisturbed.

David Adoniram's thick eyebrows had slowly drawn down over his kindling eyes at that little ejaculation, as he had turned back into his cabin. He had compressed his straight lips, foreseeing unpleasantness that might soon needs be dealt with. For a moment, there, he had weighed the plan of going elsewhere into service of his own accord. Yet any other plantation he now knew of would have insinuated no less ambiguous a complexion in the long run. He was an alien here, in an alien and wanton land. And he had grimly elected to remain, little thinking to what degree that gallant, and almost within a stone's-throw of that very spot, would darken his already sorely tried life.

But aye little did yon polished rakehell fancy, either, that day, as he rode leisurely off toward his manor house, that *he* was looking upon aught but another trophy to be added to his varied row. That yonder woman in the doorway would stir him to the soul, change his very existence, and, in the end, convulse his whole character into something his closest intimates would have disbelieved possible, neither he nor the factor, neither David Adoniram nor indeed the poor girl herself, could ever have dreamed on.

V

THE whole horrid matter of *The Thrust*, as it came presently to be known throughout the province, burst upon the public knowledge with an abrupt and shocking suddenness, despite the fact that it had been festering inevitably for the full space of a calendar year. Thus an evil plant-growth, leaping rankly into life upon an unexpected plot, amazes the beholder with a sense of its spontaneity, where yet its culture had been secretly preparing by deliberate and regular development through measurable spaces of time.

Kit Rood's treacherous hand may have hastened that dark ripening. But the seed thereof had been more remotely, and even more remorselessly sown by that grim company of scatterers: Heredity, environment, perversion, necromancy, jealousy and wild, vain regret. Whether in guilt or in innocence, alas, what matter?

One year had passed since young Sir Francis' stepping into his American inheritance; six weeks since the now notorious duello with the hulking planter; a full fortnight since Kit Rood's semi-public humiliation at the hands of David Adoniram Craig.

The day was fine and crisp.

That morning, David Adoniram, opening his great Bible at random to read his daily chapter before breaking fast, had struck upon the eleventh of the Second Book of Kings, wherein is told of David, of Uriah, and of Bath-sheba, the Hittite's wife. He had made nothing of the chance, save to marvel in passing at the frailty even of the Lord's anointed. But he had remarked that Dorcas seemed paler than her wont. Her color had momentarily quite gone. And as she stood listening there with half-bent head and folded hands, he had interrupted to ask her gently—

"Are you ill, Dorcas?"

But she had shaken her head.

"Do not ask, David," she had said in a low voice.

And presently he had gone forth to his stint at his anvil, pondering only the difficult portion that fell to all women; for he had thought he understood.

It was one of those days in early Autumn,

upon which, in Old England, hallooing troops of mounted huntsmen sweep joyously on over the fields, while the thrilling horn rings out, and the tawny thunderbolt of fox bursts from the underbrush and into the open, racing for cover from the eager hounds. Here in languid Virginia, too, something of that keenness had filtered into the heavy air. A salt wind blew in from the distant sea, tingling and bracing, yet not damp. The drifting scent of wood-smoke stole pleasantly on the nostrils. There seemed a promise of future sharpness in the weather, unusual and exhilarating.

A day of days, whether for pleasaunce or for work.

In David Adoniram's rough smithy, the earth floor was cluttered with tools, castings, and fifty other signs of pressing toil. A great pyramid of new iron lay piled to one side of the forge. Eh, but its arrival had been impatiently looked for. Young Sir Francis' sweating Africans had fetched it up from the flatboats that very dawn.

The three-foot bars of heavy metal, criss-crossed one above the other with sedulous regularity for quick lifting, heating and hammering, bore, each of them, the stamp of a famous English founder. They were of good bloom. And Sir Francis himself had appeared at David Adoniram's cabin, the evening before, to apprise of their approach, and to bespeak especial energy in their fashioning.

The unloading of those bars on the Jamestown wharf the previous afternoon had aroused not a little envy. There had been talk of nothing but that shipment. Another evidence of the silver spoon! Why, tool-forging was an English monopoly; and forbidden to provincials save to import from the home cutlers. 'Slid, but Frank was Fortuna's favorite! No thing he touched, but prospered; no favor asked, but 'twas granted straightway! Your ordinary Virginian had to pay three prices for th' indifferently finished article. But irresistible Frank Vaux——

Well, here were the bars. Though he himself had expressed a laughing uneasiness of obtaining the coveted privilege, he was known somehow to have crept up the King's own sleeve; his very Majesty could deny him nothing. And as the devil would have it, there to his hand was a dexterous smith to shape his metal, too. *One* roundhead i' the colony; and *he*, as it happened, yielding in skill to none, no, not to the best abroad; and who to lodge and use his powers of course, but lucky Frank Vaux!

Only one thing had seemed puzzling and out of character, in a sort; and that was young Sir Francis' disproportioned satisfaction when the precious manifest had come to light among the rest of the sailing-master's papers. His sigh of relief had all but rivaled his own Scotch factor's. Had he grown as cursedly avaricious, egad?

Sir Francis himself had strolled in, once or twice during that day, upon the progress of the future scythes, plow-blades and tobacco-knives. After his first visit, he had detailed black Ajax to the bellows in the smithy, and had nonchalantly offered David Adoniram whatever other slaves might be needed in any way, so only the forging were speeded. Why he seemed so feverish for a labor that would overwhelm his smith without respite, was unclear. Certes, this new task must withdraw David Adoniram completely, and from indispensables. But what was plain was, that he had set his will upon the matter. He had given definite orders even—a most unusual thing—as to the form, variety, and *number* of implements to be finished, and the very space of time—scant enough!—within which their minimum must be done.

Yet despite his master's demands, and the wasting huge fire that glowed on the forge under Ajax's exertions, and the fact that next day would bring the Sabbath when the work would necessarily halt, at one o'clock of that afternoon David Adoniram Craig stood motionless at his anvil, without a thought to the metal under his hands, gazing vacantly out through the open door toward the James. He had hurried to his hasty noon meal, zealous to be back at his duty. And not ten minutes after his return he had moved about as in a stupor, or had stood rooted and oblivious, as now.

THE feathered head of an Indian stirred silently in the distance. A wild turkey, dangling from the savage's flintlock, revolved slowly therefrom at the end of a thin thong. Did yonder figure engross the smith's attention? He stared intently out upon it with knitted brows, as if yon darkly graceful form held something to be contended for. The gripped bar that lay on the anvil between

the tenacious tongs faded rapidly from blinding white, through angry red, to dull, somber black. But David Adoniram leaned heavily down upon his hammer, while the moments slipped by, and the urgent tool-fashioning delayed. The distant form disappeared. The smith's grimy knuckles grew white with tension above the end of the long, ashwood helve.

"No!" he said resolutely under his breath. "No!"

And he turned back to his work. The heated bar he had meant to beat into shape had grown quite cold. He looked at it uncomprehendingly for a moment, then seized it again with the tongs, and moved to thrust it into the flame.

But, whether or no, his eyes fell away again from his labor and toward a corner near the door, where, no long while since, he had violently flung a little perfumed missive, pink in color, now lying so incongruously amid the litter of that smithy.

"No!" he exclaimed again.

Ajax ducked forward a woolly head subserviently.

"Aye, massa?"

"*Aye.*"

David Adoniram whirled as if stung.

That single monosyllable, uttered quite evidently out of officious eagerness alone, much as a dog, fawning, might wag an ingratiating tail, seemed here fraught with other and revolting significance to the Puritan smith.

He glared upon the shrinking African with a vacant fury that showed the slave's identity had momentarily dropped away from his consciousness. Ajax's question had rung startlingly like a remorseless answer, a bitter answer to a query which David Adoniram himself had been endeavoring, this hour past, to banish from mind. But in an instant, recognition stepped in, though confusedly; so utterly had the smith been in bond to his own brooding.

"What art thou doing here? Answer me—. Ah, I had forgotten; I had forgotten thee. Go out, heathen."

He pointed toward the door.

"Must blow him fire?"

"Go out; out I say. Go into the fields—anywhere. I do not need thee here."

Ajax grinned delightedly. A holiday! He dropped the wooden handle of the bellows and moved lithely to be gone. The big massa might repent of his kindness. He had reached the threshold——

"Stay!" said David Adoniram suddenly. "Ajax— Come hither. Look me in the face. And remember, heathen, tell me no lies." The menace in those dour features was not good to see as the slave abjectly shuffled near the anvil. "Who came here into the smithy whilst I was without? What man? What woman?"

Despite nearness to the fierce heat, the black's teeth began at once to chatter. In a twinkling his expression had changed from extravagant joy to the extreme of deadly fear.

"No man, massa, no, no."

"Who was here in this smithy? Who entered here whilst I was gone to my cabin? Answer me!"

"No here! No man!"

David Adoniram peered into that sweating face now grayish with fright:

"Thou'rt lying, familiar!" he said, as his hard hand shot out and he seized Ajax by the throat. "Thou'st eyes in thy skull. Thou wert here. Who entered here whilst I was gone? Who laid yon pink, perfumed filth on my anvil, weighting it down with my own hammer?"

He began to draw Ajax slowly nearer, and under the shadow of his uplifted right hand that gripped the heavy sledge. His merciless left hand tightened. The cold excitement under which he here labored must have been tremendous, to stir up in him, the sober Puritan, this unwonted deliberation to murder.

Dazzling sparkles danced suddenly before the slave's eyes; took to swimming slowly up and down in air about him. His breath shut off. His tongue crept forth.

Tell! tell! Anything, any secret; so only that iron vise relax from his throat that was bursting the heart in his ribs, darkening the eyes in his head. *Akh-k! akh-k!* The slave's whole body began to fight for respiration.

"Who entered this smithy?"

David Adoniram loosed his hold a little.

But across Ajax's glistening back, at that instant of terrified desire for confession, a cruel lacework of old scars commenced suddenly to throb and jerk like a very message of warning; a pang; and worse even than those pulsations in his aching gullet now preciously released from torment. No six weeks ago, those scars had streamed

blood from nape to buttocks. *Aië, aië, aië!* —fire-sharp!

He felt again the knife-edge of the overseer's lash, excruciating, that had sliced his writhing flesh to ribbons. And confused amid the whistling thongs, now glimpsed, now palpitatingly felt—two faces. Sah Francis'—and another's. Another face, brutal, heavy-jawed, leering. *That face* —his agony—because he had spied on its defeat—in the headsman's palace—where the glittering long-knives had whispered.

The whole hideous vision was like a lightning flash. Tell? *Aië*, no, no, no! Slave's brain was slow; but slave's flesh was quick and its memory quick. Rather any risk than confront the *face*, the chained-post, the lash and the death-pain again. He would lie. He would dare punishment from *this* lord-who-had-been-nearly-magnanimous. He would lie. Later, later, Ajax could always confess, always, if worse approached—

"Me see no man," he gasped, "no man! Massa go, Ajax go—smithy empty. Massa coming, Ajax creep in quick. Ah! ah! good, good, good, good, good!"

He tore himself loose unexpectedly, and fell on his knees near the anvil, groveling and begging for mercy.

But he had already been forgotten. The smith had crossed over to the door where the note lay crumpled, and, bending down, was picking up the pink paper and smoothing it out grimly. Ajax crept away toward a wall; his action remained unheeded. The smith was staring blackly at the little missive in his hand. His straight lips were set. A tiny, rigid pulse twitched in his cheek.

"What matter who sent it?" murmured David Adoniram. "Here it is. Verily, I have been as the foolish, and suspicion stingeth as an adder; an unworthy thing. David, David, in this serpent's nest to give heed to every viper's hiss——"

He took a step toward the forge and made to toss the evil, perfumed insinuation into the flames.

But once again, willy nilly, as his eyes fell upon the pyramid of iron newly set down that morning, and passed dully onward therefrom toward the crouching slave so unusually commanded to assist in yon silly urgency—the morning's hazard invaded his disquieted mind—the chance opening of the Bible at that particular passage, upon that particular day; the parable of Uriah and David—*David* that was by no means his namesake, neither here nor yonder.

Signs, portents, those were idolatrous things sternly to be disbelieved. If a tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. But the Finger of God Himself, in His own Book——

He unfolded the paper in his hand. A strange instrument—if it were one—to be used in witness of holier voice:

> This is the fourth warning, smith—ran the note—'Twill be the last. Have ye a pretty wife? verily. Ponder now the new iron shipment. Are ye closely engrossed therewith? Yea, who imported yon shipment? Two are young, lusty, handsome; one is old, godly, busy. An ye choose to be a fool—good. Ye will be a horned one. If not, go to the pavilion i' the clearing at 3 o' this afternoon. Knock once, then quickly thrice, then once; and ye will see what ye will see.
>
> FAIR PLAY FOR PURITANS.

A wave of fury swept over David Adoniram as he once more crushed the paper in his fist. So that was why Dorcas had lost color that morning? She was guilty! Yea, God's parable had searched her out and she had trembled. Oh, vile, vile. *Do not ask*, she had said, sheltering her soul's iniquity behind her wretched, womanly body's frailty.

THREE o' that afternoon? Suspicion had been slow in finding foothold; but once ensconced, it gripped yon disciplined, self-contained man with an obstinacy impossible to shake off. He strode to the open doorway, his heavy sledge mechanically fast-held the while, and stared up into the sky at the position of the sun.

The blinding ball had but just passed the quarter. There still wanted an hour of the time set forth.

Should he drop everything here on the instant, and make straight for the house to confront Dorcas with her shame? She was guilty, she was an adultress, by the wrathful Jehovah! In the pure days of Judah and Israel, she would have burned alive for her sin!

Guilty? David Adoniram's interminable hour of tainted brooding on this theme had pointed his every thought in only one direction. A score of corroborations rushed into his memory; a hundred details of Dorcas' actions of the past weeks—aye, months!—that stood out now to him with clearer interpretation of their true intent.

Two are young, lusty—? He had been blind. He had been criminal, by Heaven. The sin had been no less his than hers, that he had permitted this abomination to see light by his own hearth-fire. He understood now Dorcas' recent strangenesses toward him; her embarrassment in his presence; her frequent silences; her sudden spells of inconsequent loquacity; her new proneness to small irritations; her spasmodic bursts of extravagant tenderness; her appraising glances that he had now and again intercepted, quite unaware at the time . . . . Oh, he knew how to read them all; aye, all of them and more.

And the worldly topics, song-snatches, frippery-talk that had of late obtruded in her discourse; and the constant proximity of that gaudy Satan's spawn Sir Francis himself, that took on other color now with his languid mouth-brought commands, and his damnable ridings and loiterings about yon humblest of blacksmith cabins. *Him* he had thought to watch; but not ever——

David Adoniram uttered a curse that was more a broken sob, and made blindly across the threshold. He would go straight to his wife. He would confront her with her sin. Upon her knees Dorcas should confess and repent of it.

Suddenly he felt a shock in his right hand that jarred his arm to the shoulder. His sledge! In his convulsive grip it had struck against the solid doorpost as he had rushed by. The smith looked stupidly down at it.

"My sledge!" he shuddered. "No, not that, no. I must leave that behind. God knows——"

He violently slung the ponderous tool from him backward into the smithy. It clinked and fell heavily upon litter or other metal.

Empty-handed now, he stepped deliberately forward. For the moment he had grown collected enough, though his nostrils quivered. She should confess and repent of it. Upon her knees she should avow her sin, and then— Dorcas! He ground his teeth together, cold rage and hot pity struggling in his breast. Her, her—

Strict Judge in Heaven! Her he would not touch, no, save with the edge of conscience; but *him*, but the curled malignant himself, Sir Francis, the stealthy wolf that had sidled out upon his one ewe lamb, that had brought ruin to his door— David Adoniram's strong fingers slowly opened and closed.

He had stopped once more. Indeed, though he was unaware of the fact, he had gone no further away from the smithy than would ordinarily have sufficed to bring him within reach of the farm breakages of heavier sort that were laid up here and there about the building.

A stone's-throw away, he could see the familiar grayish-blue smoke of his dwelling eddying and swirling gustily in the unwonted wind above his rough stone chimney. He had built the vent with his own hands, plastering its every cranny with his own labor. How detached it now seemed from any moment of his life, David Adoniram's—the cabin, the chimney, the smoke. How apart and utterly alone he here felt. A whole world of connected movement stirred about him, that yet suddenly appeared to exclude him, and only him.

The smoke waved a plume at him; a near-by juniper bush bobbed all its berries.

Smoke? Dorcas was within the house. If he blundered in now upon her, what surety had he that he would discover the truth? What proof but an anonymous note if he accused her? If she were guilty— A lump rose to his throat, as if an he had been the veriest schoolboy. If she had been vile enough to be guilty, she would be cunning enough to outface him, to deny everything, to melt into tears with her girlish face, her brimming eyes, her honest, sweet-seeming ways.

Her falseness could then by no means be brought home to her; neither this time nor perhaps any time; whilst they two lived together forever in growing suspicion and poisonous discord. And lay hand on Dorcas in violence he would not, no, not the weight of his littlest finger.

And if she were innocent . . . ?

His words would break her heart.

There was but one course to take. David Adoniram turned slowly back into his smithy. It was never Dorcas' wont to go a hundred paces from the house during the day. He was a fool, a monster, a gull. The very baseness of his suspicion was like filth flung against the reputation of the purest woman in the Americas. But he would bide in the smithy till toward three o' that afternoon. Had no great while to arrive. And then, upon one pretext or another, he would go up and enter his cabin. If she were within——

She would be within!

"What evil thing is this possesses me?" muttered David Adoniram to himself. "The very air in this land weighs with wantonness. Three times before, I cast yon perfumed abominations into a hell-fire where they belonged. And should I now this fourth time— David, David, for the sin of ogling, and jealousy, and vanity——"

He walked over to his anvil. It was bare. The sledge lay on the earth floor about a yard away, where it had landed when he flung it in through the open doorway. He looked moodily around him—the smithy was empty. Ajax had disappeared. The fire in the forge had begun to withdraw into itself beneath a thickening crust of charrings and ashes.

David Adoniram picked up his sledge, leaned it against the anvil, and turned to blow up the fire. But in the act he paused irresolutely, his palm resting on the wooden bellows-handle. He felt a sickening uncertainty as to the position of the sun; could by no means remember it, though he had glared upward for the very purpose but a moment since.

Dropping the handle, he walked again toward the door, biting his lips and twisting his hands. He stared up into the sky. The very sun seemed to have stood still. He could see the high cloud-space under its lower rim, between it and the dark elm-tops. Had maintained the same distance this eternity past! He turned indoors, paused, and made another step forward. Finally he moved wholly into the smithy again, and sat down within the shadow of the wall. From that vantage the sun would be visible for a long time.

And a long time, indeed, it seemed, unending, that he sat there; glancing up now and then; and now and again staring intently down with empty absorption at the weeds and silly grass-blades that marched in curious procession on toward the threshold of his smithy. Never had the minutes crawled as now. That hour seemed to unfold and unfold itself interminably in a manner never before experienced.

However, all waits come to their close, e'en watched ones. At last the sky-gap narrowed above the elms; the shadow of the windbreak at the eastern edge of the tobacco-field crept out toward the blasted yellow pine; and it was all but three o' the afternoon.

DAVID ADONIRAM rose, and walked rapidly toward his house. If Dorcas were within—good; of that, later. If not, he would go on from there without waste of time to the pavilion i' the clearing, and there make an uninvited third at the rendezvous. He knew the place. Sir Francis had built it for his lewdnesses. Aye—thought David Adoniram fiercely—no little was that son o' Belial cautious in that sort for the dear repute of a dead father's roof that could yet suffer no smirch from the scarlet gaming, and ribaldry and guzzling that neighed forth therefrom at all hours of the day and night.

If Dorcas were not within her home where she belonged, but were found in yon pavilion instead—by Heaven, she had been lured there. She had been enticed by that silken devil, or carried off against her will, and in that case——

He had reached his door. The dwelling seemed ominously quiet. Ordinarily, he would have heard Dorcas bustling within; or she, hearing his known step approaching, would have appeared on the instant; or have called out from within, being busied.

He entered.

The house was empty.

Its one room, compact, stood queerly familiar—deserted, as though to a return after years of absence and bewilderment to behold it quite unchanged. A fire burned on the hearth; the black iron pot swung slightly from its crane as hung there no great while since;—but his wife was gone.

From that moment, events moved with harsh rapidity to their close, crowding into the intense space of three-quarters of an hour the more leisurely destined portions of three several lifetimes.

David Adoniram walked unhesitatingly to the neat bedstead where he and Dorcas had been wont to sleep, fell on his knees before it, and drew from under it a longish cedar coffer that he had brought from Bristol with their few effects, three years ago.

He opened it. With methodical speed, he lifted out its contents, one after the other, and piled them carefully on the back-turned lid of the box. They were mostly parting gifts, simple linens and the like, that had been pressed upon his young wife by the kind folk in Dumfries as in Bristol Port.

He knew exactly what he was doing; for always, when the time came for action,

David Adoniram's habit of mind was unerring and admitted of no delay. At the very bottom of the coffer and to one side, stretching the entire length of the studded wooden base, lay an unworn leather sheath with a battered hilt protruding. This he lifted out and set on the hard earth floor beside him. Then he returned the contents to their place, one after the other, in due order, closed down the lid, shoved back the box under the bed, picked up the sheathed weapon he had thus brought to light, and rose to his feet. He had worked quickly. The whole matter had not taken above a minute at most.

Holding the sheath in his left hand, he drew out the sword, looked at it for an instant, and immediately thrust it naked into the belt about his waist, lifting his curt hide-apron to do so.

There was a tight smile about his mouth, a hard light in his eyes. His father's claymore! It had cut to earth just such lewd, filthy malignants at Naseby and at Marston Moor, had saved Dorcas once, and would do no less this day and soon. Insinuation of Dorcas' own culpability he had by this time put away from his mind. Knowing her and believing in her, and now with his old, tangible weapon of righteousness that had rescued her again firmly gripped in his hand, his thought ran single-edged in its enmity.

Alone one action of his, in all that driving stress, came from him unpremeditated. With an odd, involuntary gesture, just as he was about to depart, he tossed the empty leather sheath squarely into the hottest glow of the dancing fire on the hearth. Then he made for the door, and directly toward the pavilion i' the clearing.

He crossed his tiny kitchen-midden, skirted the brook that bent around it, turned, and entered the virgin forest some two hundred yards back of his own cabin.

The pavilion was said to stand in a clearing. But the extent actually cleared, save for the ground-plot o' the pavilion itself, was all but negligible. A thick laurel-hedge sprang from the immediate fringe of gravel that circled the little bagnio; and great elm trees, leaning discreetly over even from behind those laurels, cast an ambiguous twilight constantly upon pavilion and clearing, both.

David Adoniram's feet made no sound as he moved swiftly over the deep leaf-mould. It was only when his steps crunched on the gravel leading to the low-roofed passage itself, which conducted, through two successive doors, into the interior of the pavilion, that his approach might have been heard and seen.

A small casement to one side of this portico-passage overlooked the brief path. But the smith had attained close against the outer door and quite out of view from that casement, e'en while his vanished tread still echoed.

Arrived there, David Adoniram, now come to the very focus of hazard, was touched fleetingly with one last pang of indecision. If yon two were within that bagnio—Dorcas, Sir Francis—then what value in the peculiar signal set forth in the anonymous note? Why would they answer, in such case? And why a signal at all?

But he raised his hand and knocked once, then quickly thrice, then once. And immediately he heard a latch lift somewhere within, then a little eager run of footsteps, and a muffled fumbling t'other side of his outer door. He could feel a slight tremor in the planks against his flat-pressed palms. Then a bar dropped, another latch clicked, and the outer door swung inward, on the instant, and into a short vestibule. David Adoniram blinked. It was pitch dark in that passage that stood a moment empty——

But only a moment. For, in the space of time that it would take one to avoid an inswung door and hurry impulsively forward again, Dorcas had all but sprung into his arms, had fluttered unmistakably caressing fingers down over his sleeve, and had uttered a name that was not *his* name.

"Francis—" she whispered.

Simultaneously a little scream, a sharp intake of breath and a panic-stricken backward start came from her, as her touch encountered not the sleek, expected rustle of cavalier satin, but the hot, familiar, hard-muscled bare flesh of her husband's arm.

"David!" she cried faintly.

The outer door shut to with a dull jar. The smith had set his back against it, holding his wife fast and drawing her with him.

"David," was his grim reply.

What deed might have ensued then and there in that blackness is beyond knowing; in special if one lend any credence whatsoever to rumor of yon smith's direct and unheard-of share in the ultimate outcome of *The Thrust*. Not lay the weight of his littlest finger? What man holds restraint of pity

when eye to eye with his own betrayal? The naked claymore under David Adoniram's curt apron, that now pressed against both their bodies, may it not there have sundered those two—life, wedlock, soul and all—as ever any chastity-sword in medieval legend? To hold off the poor girl with the left hand, and with the right to grip for the hilt— A twinkling might have done it.

BUT hark at the outer door!

A knock once, then quickly thrice, then once.

Plain enough now why Kit Rood's pink missive had closed with subtle stress upon the private signal.

"Francis!"

Gad, the smith had been timed then, and not inexactly, to forestall that same rendezvous.

'Twas Dorcas had cried out the young man's name. Nor had David Adoniram made any move to prevent her. Instead, he released her gently enough, put her from him toward the rear of the passage, and reached under his apron for his weapon. Yon was a male creature, a sort o' man, look you, t'other side of the door. The smith's breath shortened. Eh, God was good after all, and a presumption to jog His elbow. Man with man, that was it. He clicked the latch, swung open the door, and rushed forth out of the passage. His claymore was tight in his fist. His eyes burned. He would cleave yon silken scum in two, even as Agag once was cloven before Saul.

At the threshold, the daylight, though dim, disconcerted him a moment. Sir Francis' figure seemed but a silhouette. The young rakehell stood hard against the outer doorway. So short an interval had elapsed between knock, exclamation and the unexpected apparition of the smith, that Sir Francis' dainty-shod foot, its neat plum-colored rosette at the buckle, was e'en then but lifted in air for a backward step.

"Malignant!"

David Adoniram swept up his claymore in a great, wide, honest stroke that should split yon curled pate fro' crown to chin. Defense?—he dwelt no second upon defense. He meant to have the life out of yonder body, and that at once. The other had no time to consider, e'en had he wished to. The wide, flashing blade impended. No space for more than one rearward leap, before the smith was upon him, right arm brandished, left arm far-flung, and the whole huge left side exposed.

In four lightning motions, two of them simultaneous, Sir Francis swerved to the left, whipped out his rapier, and ran Dorcas' husband through the body *a little above the left pap*, instantly withdrawing his steel. He then retreated a little, with a vexed shrug, actually lowering his point. Well he knew the effect of that thrust.

From the open casement, a scream rang out. Dorcas had been watching there, agonized, tense palms crushed against her flaming cheeks.

In the laurels behind Sir Francis, a scarce perceptible stirring occurred, an eye gleamed, and a faint chuckle was audible, stifled almost before it was uttered.

David Adoniram's furious downward cut continued—by a fraction too late. Empty air swallowed its violence. A convulsive effort to check and change its direction failed. Its impetus hardly diminished, it slashed down into the gravel, struck a hidden stone, and snapped like glass close below the hilt. David Adoniram lurched, recovered, and straightened his body deliberately, his broken weapon still clenched in his unrelaxing fingers.

He looked dazedly about him, then down at his blade.

"Broken—" he whispered.

His left hand went up to his breast and came away wet. He gazed at his fingertips—blood. At that, he frowned a little, shook his head impatiently, and dropped the useless fragment of his claymore.

"With naked hands then!" he cried, and started toward where Sir Francis, rapier drooped, stood imperturbably waiting.

But with his first forward step, a horrid shaft of pain pierced him through and through the upper body, that he closed his eyes for torment. A huskiness of phlegm seemed suddenly to rise in his throat, and he began to cough, cough. And with every spasm of his lungs and windpipe, an exquisite agony stabbed him through the left breast that brought with it, at the same time, a queer, unaccountable sweetness of languor to limbs and head.

He stood still now, mechanically drawing shorter and shorter breaths; ah, ah, so that was it? He realized at once the nature of his hurt. Had been about edge-tools, point-tools all his life; had used them, too;

and recognized this symptom of a fatal lodgment. His mouth was flooded with a pleasant, mild saltness that he quickly swallowed, rather than lean forward to spit out. Oh for a sobbing lungful of air—one, only one. But this had to be humored, for no matter how briefly. His inhalations panted to the very brink of renewing anguish.

With careful fingers, however, he undid his shirt to look down at his wound. He must make sure. A dreadful coughing-fit interrupted him, brought on by his wrenched posture. But he persisted; for, if matters lay as he thought, he would have work to do. He must know. In his present state, if surmise proved truth, for him to pursue yon mocking serpent for a grip at the throat, were criminal, wasteful. But the Hand of God——

David Adoniram's mind had never planned more clearly, nor with more somber faith. He would then lay this judgment in the Hand of God, in Whom vengeance inhered.

The presence of others the smith shut wholly out of his consciousness. His back was toward the casement where Dorcas crouched. Of Sir Francis he was oblivious now as though the other had no existence.

Ah, there it was; a bluish puncture, no wider than a pin-prick. The lips of the cut had merged almost instantly. Above and below, the skin was unbruised. But out of that one tiny aperture there bubbled forth, with every shallow rise and fall of David Adoniram's chest, a single, airy globule of bloody froth; so light, it never oozed down at all, appearing with the in-breath, it seeped gently back in retreat each time the smith's chest sank.

The thrust was bleeding inwardly.

Without another word or a backward gaze David Adoniram did an extraordinary thing.

He moved measuredly forward to his homeward journey.

He had come for a definite purpose. Had been stricken and checked, made mock of, with right all o' his side. Now he was leaving; but with purpose no less definite: weird and half insane though it was in its grim, unshaken reliance on the equity of God's future dealing. There was no hesitation, only slowness in his step, as conserving his strength. Sir Francis gave ground to him, presently avoiding quite to one side. But the smith paid him no heed, and was soon picking his pain-racked way through the laurels and through the forest.

The whole infinity of that distance that he had but just strode so shortly, his intent, unhampered will outstripped the labored progress of his feet toward his smithy. Ay, yonder—in his smithy. His anvil stood there; and his sledge; and all things prepared to his hand— He smiled strangely despite the stifle and oppression at his abdomen where breath begged. In the smithy waited the new iron, neatly piled there, that the young malignant himself had beckoned thither——

He straightened, drew a deep, involuntary inhalation.

And immediately, as it were a searching thin steel, cruel, direct and searing hot, pierced him again through and through the upper left breast. A paroxysm of coughing shook him, while his mouth filled with blood, and a dampness spread about his wound, trickling down his body under the shirt.

For the first time since receiving his fatal thrust, his attention bent away toward the weapon that had here inflicted his death.

"By a needle," he murmured.

A vague anger touched him; trivial; blotting out for a moment his darker engrossment. Sir Francis' rapier rose before his eyes, its glitter, its grace, its slenderness. A hundred times in the desperate fury of crowded battles, maugre saber, ax, pike, lance-butt, he had cloven *his* will to safety; he, that had fought stirrup to stirrup with Cromwell and the Ironsides.

"Killed and by a needle, by a needle," he said, compressing his lips.

And the rest of that interminable, careful advance, and even to the threshold of his smithy and beyond it, that one phrase kept alternating in his mind with the other that had rushed there upon his first recognition that this was his end.

"A thrust," he groaned. "The young malignant—proved irresistible. But with God's help I shall forge a blade that will somehow, some way, search out *his* heart— By a needle, a needle— Some way, somehow, search out *his* heart——"

VI

IN THE pavilion, meanwhile, and quite as falteringly, Dorcas walked with hanging head toward the doors.

Of Sir Francis' thrust she had seen nothing; knew even less what had been its effect.

Her husband's broad back had hidden from her all but the terrible gleam and sweep of his own claymore. But her whole being was shaken as by a rude awakening.

"Ah, merciful Heaven——"

Her lips quivered pitifully with shrinking repetition of the words. She had meant no harm. Certes, she was not so guilty as appearance painted her; had played unwittingly with fire; a mere lass, despite her nineteen years and the gold band on her finger. And to what a pass had she nearly come!

Not guilt, never guilt, no, no, had brought her to the pavilion i' the clearing. Had longed for no more than a peep into the romance she had sipped from old masques in her father's library. When David Adoniram had read that morning from the Bible, his chapter had touched her conscience; but truly, truly, not with any significance that her later actions might have seemed to warrant.

Her small deceit—it had been like a child's little thrilling qualm of disobedience. Yon parable she had heard had been so harsh; and the forbidden sweet *she* had contemplated so harmless, so very harmless. Her eyes filled with tears. The rage, violence and brush of sudden death that had immediately ensued, she had never dreamed on.

What had been her fault? Her whole life of the past four years, and since the day of her dreadful escape from her murdered father's house, she had been subdued of any vestige of gaiety, color, joy. She had never failed in duty toward David Adoniram; had respected him, loved him. But his austerity had been her only and constant companionship.

Sir Francis, with his debonair polish that echoed of the great world, its palaces and routs of jeweled nobles, had seemed no more insinuating than any knightly figure stepped from the pages of some ancient and sweet-sounding lay. Her adventure that afternoon had been toward no more than a glimpse of the high courtliness that here, to her eyes, moved everywhere about her, and that she had mused on, wistful, ever since their arrival in the Americas.

A tourney of courtesy; a bit o' glamor in her sober existence; a dim encounter in a forest bower, poetic— Her girlish imagination had suffused in all innocence.

Sir Francis had planned the signal; a knock once, then quickly thrice, then once. To bar the doors had lent a feeling of security; the young cavalier himself had suggested it. On the vileness of men she had thought no whit; even yon nightmare of the dragoon on horseback remaining in her memory till now only as a menace of mere cruel steel.

But now her heart beat rapidly with a sense of unworthy thankfulness toward the Power that had snatched her from error while yet there was time. Roughly her eyes had been opened. She shivered as she stepped forth into the outer air. Oh, what a lesson she had had! It would be hard, even terrifying, to face David Adoniram when she reached their cabin. Their life together might e'en never run the same, thereafter. But she was filled with a deep gratitude toward the merciful Providence that had broken David Adoniram's sword out there i' the clearing, and prevented bloodshed for her own light, wretched body's sake.

With humility, piety, service, love, all might yet be made right. If not, she would bear whatever offered as atonement proper and deserved. In every woman thus extraordinarily moved, there lies hidden the same bent toward extreme acceptance of blame, together with a momentary prostration of spirit, and a longing to expiate errors of conduct through personal dedication and effacement.

"Mistress Craig, Dorcas—" Sir Francis had come up. "Will you believe me on honor——"

But she shook her head for silence.

"You are not to blame. I am to blame. Oh, Sir Francis, what a lesson I have had. I was like a silly nurse-child thirsting for fairy tales, forgetful that you were a man, David Adoniram a man, and I a grown woman and married. Oh, thank God, Sir Francis, no blood has been shed, no greater harm done here than may, through God's mercy, yet well be mended. For if you had been killed, or—God forbid, forbid!—my own husband——"

She made a gesture of despair, crushed her hand against a sob, and hurried by him through the laurels. Sir Francis stared after her, biting his lips. She did not know, then; did not even suspect! He looked down at his rapier that was clouded a full fourth of its brightness. Then he walked slowly after Dorcas.

He could see her ahead of him all the way through the wood; could make out, beyond her, the tall, stooping figure of his Puritan smith. And thus they three returned home in a chain, one behind the other. Dorcas' rapid step had almost instantly slackened to a snail's-pace upon glimpse of her husband, and yon poor wretch in the distance was all at a crawl.

It had never been Sir Francis' wont to trouble about others' feelings. His callous, sensuous philosophy of life had always centered concern 'pon his own pleasures alone. But he found himself then and there inexplicably lucid about yonder young wife's unhappy reluctance to overtake what *she* considered her hardest moment. An outraged husband, his fury, and an unending vista of future misery, was so clearly the sum of her dread.

"The ——" he thought uncomfortably. "She is all a-tremble at the empty shadow. 'Tis her *ignorance* that makes this tragedy. A few further rods of exertion and she will shudder in earnest."

Ill at ease, he cozened himself for an instant into belief that it was the subtilty o' the contradiction that drew forth his pity; and that he was being stirred here solely as by some skilful, well-planned horror upon a particularly effective stage. A meddlesome husband slain while meddling; certes, that was no novelty; had no special uneasiness for him!

But despite sophistry and impatient evasion, Sir Francis felt the queerish question growing in his mind whether that scoundrel Kit, six weeks before this, had jeered him on an absolute lie or on some incredible, twisted premonition.

Yon planned encounter with Dorcas i' the pavilion; their previous brief exchanges, banterings, stolen discourses during all those past months, had presented an exalted cast quite absent from any adventure he remembered in his lively experience with her sex. What had led him to plan that meeting in his ambiguous forest lodge, what he had hoped for or looked forward to, he himself scarcely knew. He felt suddenly oppressed with a sense of shame, as if he had been tempted toward the unspeakable. And so foreign was this sensation to him, that he made an involuntary gesture with his shapely hand. Ecod, was this Frank Vaux moralizing?

And yet—he respected yonder woman. He *had* respected her. She was different from any that he had ever met; so eager, so ingenuous, so like a child in her illusions of nobility and high dreams. Had he known a sister she might have been like Dorcas. His very mother, aye—but he remembered nothing of her.

Stay. Dorcas had halted.

Sir Francis stopped also, waiting to see what would now transpire. The young wife had reached the edge of the trees, was leaning dejectedly against a broad trunk, and gazing across the open. But David Adoniram had never paused; was moving doggedly though slowly on.

Gad, the endurance of the man. He should have collapsed minutes ago. Where was he going? What did he intend—an information? Your commons never did have a sense of honor; but he would be speechless before ever he reached a wherry, and cold long before that oared him into Jamestown.

To his cabin—? Yes— No— To his smithy! And why *there* of all places?

Hark! Sir Francis turned quickly and looked behind him. He had heard a rustle, a footstep. He scanned the path—empty. He frowned slightly and drew away his hand from his rapier. A silly hold this matter had taken of his imagination. He had scarcely thought himself so suscept— And there again, what imbecility to vapor here e'en if but fleetingly, that *susceptible* was the very tag Kit Rood had dubbed him with!

But now Dorcas had left her tree, and was moving with accelerated pace across the field. Was she, too, making for the smithy? Sir Francis started forward. Best follow her perhaps; for there was no knowing what yon fanatic might not attempt i' such moment as this.

Yet—no. She had swerved after barely perceptible hesitation, and was evidently bound for her home. Sir Francis shrugged his shoulders. Certes, one could not dally here forever. The outcome was undoubted, and would, when Dorcas discovered it, e'en prove damnably unpleasant. But he lingered a while in spite of himself, and at last issued from cover and approached the point of interest by some fifty yards. He could see Dorcas' form that appeared once or twice in the doorway and slowly withdrew again from view.

"She is racked by the suspense," thought Sir Francis; "has, by this time, even some apprehension of the truth. Ah——"

His exclamation, though uttered under his breath, might have been heard over the distance by Dorcas. For she had showed herself at the same moment in her doorway, had leaned forward with all intensity, and then, tossing up her hands in gratitude, had vanished again within the cabin.

White smoke mingled with sparks was belching and billowing from the chimney that rose above the smithy!

What now? Sir Francis gazed stupefied. But in a short time that seemed long, there came the unmistakable *clink* of hammer on anvil; then a silence; then *clink, clink, clink* again, in a continuation of steady unremitted notes, punctuated at regular intervals by a heavier, duller blow.

"Back at his labor, by heaven!" murmured Sir Francis.

Relief and amazement, both sharpened not a little by amused disdain, elbowed for mastery there in the young rakehell's attention. Had he thrust amiss then? *C'est ça.* Well, he would hardly regret it, even from the standpoint of vanity in his own skill. Eh, the vitality of yonder roundhead. The man was an ox; and certes, not in the matter of brute strength alone. Was just about as sensitive in's finer feelings. A clod; a lump o' dull metal at the very worthiest; had struck one brief, foreign spark of *gentilesse*—and back to his thick drudgery.

VII

BUT within his smithy, David Adoniram had made straight for his forge. His strength was ebbing fast. Yet his mind seemed keener than ordinary, though with a dogged madness in it weighing the importance of trifles. Time, time—to hoard the precious, escaping seconds. What *he* had to do, he must first fully do; and then— His wide eyes lit with fanatic fire; his lips muttered a vengeful text. And *then* he could leave the rest to Him who said He would repay.

Must repeat no unnecessary movements. Could not afford them. He had remembered the iron bar abandoned i' the embers this half hour past—was't no longer ago?— It was to have been a scythe. The stern mouth twisted in a smile: *Time his scythe, Death his sickle.* The fateful metal had retained a mort o' heat; would save a full two minutes on a cold bar.

With four or five motions the smith fanned the deep glow to a blaze, released the wooden bellows-handle, and stooped to drag a heavy fuel-sack into easier reach. The exertion drove a harassing cough upon him which he strove with all power to repress, though forced to pause, to rest a palm for support somewhere. His anvil——

The smooth surface felt cool to his feverish hand. Ah, to be out in the rain, near the brook that ran by the armorer's-shop, yonder, yonder, across the wet sea, in Scotland— But he drew away his reluctant hand and turned again to the bag. He must not waste time, time.

He picked up lump after lump of charcoal and packed it swiftly in the forge on all sides of the crimsoning bar. Then he crossed the familiar dirt floor for the last time—yea, he knew it for his last time!—lifted the stone jug of oatmeal-drink and fetched it back with him. He would need it. A thrust through the lung—thirst, thirst. Not only sick metal but *sick men* needed tempering to accomplish enduring effects.

The sledge? Ah, there it was. The tongs, the water, the oil? All was ready to his hand. Somberly he stared before him as he laid hold on the bellows-handle and drove a blast into the furnace that it roared again. Not with water alone and not with oil alone would he temper *this* forging.

At best, he had a half-hour to live; with jealous caution, a quarter of an hour longer. He drew his shaggy brows down over his eyes as his enemy began to stab him again in the upper left breast. His breath caught, his heart pounded as he locked his lips. Yea, he had witnessed the like. And was it truly, then, too late? With perfect stillness, limpness, quiet, a man might yet perhaps, perhaps——

Childish. He shook his head grimly at his own fool's-paradise, seized his tongs, and drew the sparkling bar out of the flame.

"Oh, God," he prayed silently, as he brought the sharp of his sledge down. His stroke cut the iron in two. "In Thy Hands I lay my cause. Let me but live twenty minutes—fifteen minutes. In that time I will beat Thee out a weapon Thou wilt have no shame in."

With his first blow, a gush of blood had leaped to his mouth. Under his shirt, a tepid stream had at once begun to trickle

down his body. But he swallowed violently and plunged like one possessed into his torment. Stroke after stroke came from his hammer. He had gripped the two halves of hot metal, had laid them together on the anvil, and whirled the sledge about toward the broad, and beaten and welded the snug-lying pieces into one bar of sheer steel, with the speed of a miracle.

His visage had grown awful to see; the cheeks fallen in and livid, a red patch flaring high on either cheek-bone, the sweat standing out with the veins on his forehead, the teeth showing clenched through a haggard lift in his upper lip. His eyes glittered like pin-points. Twenty minutes, only twenty—fifteen! No! He asked for no more! If he but lived, lived that length of time, he would take it as an omen, an answer——

The far wall had begun to sway curiously—slowly forward—slowly backward—toward him—then again away. He closed his eyes. He must hurry. He must hurry.

He seized the welded bar again with the tongs and thrust it in among the live coals. Heedless of flesh-burns, or of the acrid fumes of gas puffing up from the blue dancing jets of flame, he packed charcoal everywhere, in every chink and cranny that showed lurid about the re-heating steel.

A whirl of poisonous vapor caught at his already strangling throat, and redoubled his hacking cough. His broad shoulders shook with the spasm. But he grasped the bellows-handle ferociously like the stiffened wrist of a foe, and bore down with all his weight upon the wood till the flame reverberated.

His knees began to tremble. Sweat blinded him. Agony lived in his left lung from apex to root, ah, more vivid than the withering forge-hell he peered into. But only when the outer rim of dark charcoal had begun to brighten, when he could no longer tell glowing metal from glowing coal, did he relax his grip and sway back from the forge. He staggered.

Thirsty— He stretched an avid, shaking hand toward his stone jug and heaved it to his lips. The oatmeal-water splashed over his chin and neck. It was cool, cool. He made to drink greedily—but controlled himself with an effort. No; he would presently need it worse than this. He must hurry. He must hurry.

But in spite of himself, his shoulders sagged. He felt an irresistible longing to sink down on the stool that stood so near, and rest, a minute, a half-minute.

No—he dared not. After the next process— No, the next after that. Was he growing unclear? *Then* he would rest; he would rest perforce; he would rest for five precious, unavoidable minutes while the iron—while the steel—while the iron cooled off.

E'en in his dizzy vagueness of thought he had wasted no fraction of a second. For, close-paralleled with his blur of musing had come his hasty gulping of water, his fury of whirling back to the forge, plucking forth the white-hot bar of metal, laying it quickly on the anvil, and reaching down for his upright sledge.

The hidden witness who had brushed away the cobwebs from the small window i' the wall to David Adoniram's right no long while ago, and whose blood-shot gaze had followed with astounded malice every move of the fey Puritan smith, could have testified here to a most horrid diligence.

The sword-maker's craft is a high order of skill. Your expert shapes a sound blade in a twinkling, as it were. And David Adoniram, more dexterous than most, driven here under a two-barbed goad—his strange bigoted expectation of vengeance, his headlong slavery 'gainst his own certain collapse—wrought like a madman.

With crowding strokes so rapid that his sledge brushed the sparks it had evoked in its last brief descent, David Adoniram beat and hammered and turned and beat and hammered again, till the yielding metal flew into form under his power, and the visionary weapon that had leaped into his thought back yonder i' the forest, now assumed palpable shape here on his anvil. A sword, a sword!

"By ——" thought Kit Rood at his window, "I have never seen its twin in *these* times. Savage. What's it for, i' God's name?"

For yonder weapon on the anvil resembled no blade used in civilized land or age. In length it seemed rather sword than knife; yet was too short for that, either. In shape it looked an *oar* rather than an *arm;* broad, leaf-shaped; slender near the tang; thick and heavy-weighted o' the last third of its extension. A cruel thing; with a nicked barb back-thrusting from each of its two cutting-edges toward where the hilt would come. *A Pictish sword,* was what the

Scotch factor later named it, wondering with a shudder where the dead smith could have come upon the pattern.

But whatever it was, 'twas finished with dreadful speed, carried at once back to the forge, thrust in upon a revived blaze, heated to a cherry red—to anneal—snatched forth and laid again upon the anvil to cool.

"Five minutes," muttered David Adoniram, reeling toward his stool.

He let himself down upon it in a daze. His chin dropped on his breast, his arms fell limp. His right hand still grasped the sledge, his left the tongs. The pain in his lung had grown dull, though insistent. His cough, too, seemed more difficult to repress, and at last he let it have its will of him. His whole body shook with it; a bloody foam bubbled over his mouth.

"All but done," he whispered; "both it and I."

He looked up toward his handicraft. It was still glowing, though more and more darkly.

"Less than—ten minutes—more," he said drowsily.

His shoulders ached; his temples seemed filled with little prickling pains. Again the room began to sway curiously; and now, too, a sort of senile memory began to bend her power there upon him.

Syne he heard voices and saw visions. Vapor of vanished events condensed again out of the wide caldron of air before him, moving in tangible form through the firm fabric of his actual surroundings. The real and the unreal, at times, melted mingling into one another with such a startling simulation of truth, that he was all but fain to rise, to grasp about him at some solid thing, *any* thing, a cold tool, a door-post, an iron casting, in order to maintain his desperate hold upon actuality.

Time, place, yea, his own lamentable condition, whirled and changed before his gaze, till he grew fearful of what he would see. Fixtures seemed fixed no longer. Fey he grew, light-headed. Now he weighed down oppressed upon ground, now he floated in space. Now he stared upon solid, present things; and now, in a twinkling—Vanished the rude wooden colonial smithy wherein he waited laboring. And yet there it seemed standing, dim and wavering in outline.

This house—it was all of wood—it was all of stone. The house was his own, a stone house, an armorer's stall. Sparks flew. The steam hissing and mounting from the tempering-vat—was it mere steam? Those frequent fumes driven downward by wind gusts from under the chimney-hood assumed other shapes, absent shapes, upon which he gazed with other eyes.

One year—Bristol! His throat contracted with horror as he saw shapeless forms he never saw, dragged by cruel hands over cobbles. One—two—three—years— Virginia! Blacksmith to a lewd malignant——

"But I still—live," he murmured.

A relentless, perverted religious fervor filled him. He lifted his eyes toward the sword on his anvil. It had cooled to its black hot. He made to rise. His limbs refused their function.

" 'Must re-heat now to a cherry red;' must re-heat now to a cherry red," he repeated monotonously i' the familiar sword-maker's formula.

But he could by no means gather the strength to lift himself again to his feet. An inordinate thirst tormented him. His tongue like the roof of his mouth seemed parched. The piercing in his lung had begun once more. "By a needle, a needle," he groaned.

His pupils distended with his own phrase that wrung another from him whether or no.

"Some way, somehow search out *his* heart," he cried aloud, and got weakly to his feet. "Search out—search out that dog's own heart——"

Bent almost double he tottered to the anvil, dragged tongs and sledge with him, and laid hold on his forging. But first he drank out of the stone jug, thirstily, draining to the last drop. His own hands had grown so strangely cold, that the cool, smooth-glazed crock felt warm to his touch. His feet—icy—a slow freezing wave seemed mounting steadily toward his thighs.

"Death," he thought in despair, "death—death——"

But he set down the empty water-jug, gripped his sword with his tongs, and thrust the weapon again into the fire, heaving feebly thereafter at the bellows. His every action now was all but mechanical; the very shadow of an energy; with even the will itself almost faded from perception.

The third re-heating, the plunging of the cherry-red blade into the oil to cool it, the faint, deliberate rubbing with the rough half-brick to clear off the scale that the

colors might show in the later drying of the temper, were all carried out as by a man already dead, an automaton, a lay-figure. Only the dry cough, intermittent, the inevitable, horrid effusion that accompanied it, still betrayed the presence of mortality.

When the scale had all been cleared away, and the sword showed naked in its every cruel line, even the brutal watcher at the window could not restrain a sinking qualm at the pit of his stomach for sight of it.

"The man's a warlock!" muttered Kit Rood with an oath, half recoiling. "What's it *for?* Who is it meant for, egad?" And, frighted to the black heart of him with superstitious dread, he all but turned to slink away from the gruesome spot.

But a fascination of curiosity, as well as of hatred still unquenched, held him bound to his judas-hole. For the smith had straightened his tall form to its full height, expanding his body, and rearing up his head with a smile curving his lips, as full of life, energy and even a sort of wild joy, as a dying candle-flame that flares up to a thrilling, dazzling brightness one instant before snuffing out forever. And there were words again from him, o' God's name; incantations, like, nought but expressions o' color; yellow, brown, red, purple——

"*Yellow, brown, red, purple, violet, blue, gray!*" cried David Adoniram in a hoarse voice.

He had turned again to the forge. He had seized the bellows-handle and was enraging the flames again to a leaping fury. He dropped the wood. High above the bluish licking tongues he held his new-forged weapon.

"*Yellow!*" he shrilled after an interval.

His tone thinned and broke on a crescendo. 'Twas eerie to hear him there alone among his four walls.

A fit of coughing had shaken him from crown to heels; but he held the sword outstretched over the glowing charcoal-bed and all but steady. Then, suddenly: "*Brown*—" he cried, staring with all his soul in his eyes at the slowly changing steel; "*red*—" And then, almost in a rapid succession, "*purple, violet—blue!*"

And instantly, with that last word, he plucked the weapon away, brought it swiftly down edgewise to a horizontal position an inch or two from his abdomen, with his left hand ripped and tore the entire shirt away from his left breast—and contorted his body violently and mercilessly forward and downward. A torrent of blood sprang forth from his wound and poured, dripping and hissing and bubbling, down on the hot steel.

"By ——"

Kit Rood dashed a terrified hand across his eyes.

"Yon devil! Yon hell-spawn! He's tempering the damnable thing wi' his own heart's-blood!"

A half-strangled cry brought him back staring. The Puritan smith had fallen headlong, as struck by a thunderbolt; and was now lying, face-downward, on the floor of his own smithy, near his anvil, with the evil, new-forged thing smoking and smoldering on the litter a few feet away.

VIII

AND Dorcas? She, too, had been looking to her fire—her hearth-fire. An appetizing odor rose from the black motionless pot on the crane; but the brands under it seemed dull and scattered.

"I will bake a quick bannock," thought the poor girl, "and sprinkle it with sugar. I will toast a bit of cheese; David is partial to that——"

But when she drew near the hearth to rake together the embers, a faint smell as of singeing hair struck her nostrils.

"What's this?" she thought; and then began to sob. Half-charred twists of leather lay there significantly on top, stretching in a broken line over the cinders. 'Twas the remnants of David Adoniram's sheath.

"Oh, thank God," she whispered as the tears streamed down her face, while she busied herself about her pitiful expiation. "Thank God no worse has resulted. Sheaths and swords; they should never have come into the world."

And then she listened. Across the clear air, there came the sound of clinking from her husband's smithy.

"Now he is shaping his metal," she thought. And then, after a pause: "Now he is heating it, annealing it. He is a quick workman."

Low-spirited and distraught as she felt, it was no frowardness, but rather an ordinary human frailty of hope, that made her musings take on a brighter cast; perhaps David's anger would wreak itself in part 'pon the tool that he was fashioning; would

dissipate, somewhat. Perhaps, too, the food, the holiday bannock, the unwonted dainty that she was toasting— And surely, surely, he could not help but believe her; *her Davie;* not when he looked into her face and heard her lay forth the actual truth——

Hush—the sounds from the smithy had stopped. Dorcas' heart began to pound violently. Had he dropped his work and was coming toward the cabin—now, now? A panic of trembling seized her. What would he say? How would he look? And oh, at what point would she begin her difficult, her silly explanation that now seemed to grow so more and more like an hysterical lie? She stood wringing her hands, with drooped head and heaving bosom. But the moments passed and no shadow darkened the doorway. With his long strides David could have reached the cabin long ere this.

Torn with contending emotions, Dorcas stepped falteringly to the doorway and looked abroad. The smithy yonder lay as before; seeming tenantless, except for the white smoke-spiral ascending through heat-haze above the chimney. A movement i' the field to her right caught her attention. But it was only Sir Francis walking slowly away in the direction of his manor.

In spite of herself, a horrid premonition of she knew not what, insinuated itself among the blur of desperately comforting conjectures which she forced, willy-nilly, into her consciousness. David was polishing his labor. David was tempering his labor. David was grown enraged once more and had flung's work aside. He was leaning, brooding, 'pon his sledge on his anvil. He was seated, brooding, on the small stool near the bellows. Yea, perhaps— And Dorcas' own wish to believe this last, made it seem almost an actuality, a sight seen and o' *truth* with her own two eyes. Yea, perhaps he had e'en thought out the straight o' the matter of his own accord; and was even now seated yonder, repentant, and all-ashamed to come to her and confess his folly i' the thing.

The silence lasted.

With a quick glance to the bannock, and a little run and touch to the embers, Dorcas hurried from the room. Eh, she would be back in time to keep the cake fro' scorching. Just a glimpse in at Davie through the open door to see—that all was well. She'd not disturb him. If he saw her— A tremulous smile stirred her mouth; she winked her wet lashes. Well, then perhaps yon cake would scorch after all.

With light, rapid steps she crossed the space betwixt cabin and smithy. She was almost at yon very door, when her foot struck a loose pebble; sent it rattling 'gainst a sun-warped rake. She stopped, her heart in her throat. But no sound came to her from within. Timorously she made again to advance, but lost courage at the last moment. She would but peep in on him, on David, on Davie, poor fellow, that had been so shabbily treated. The softer form of his assumed name kept rising unusually to her lips. And then she would run back to her home where she belonged, and wait for him there. And when he came in to his meal— Her face grew scarlet. Then she would tell him the secret that she had kept from him this week past, and that must have made her every action so—so *queer-seeming* to him. She would look in upon him through the small window t'other side, that was so rarely used it had grown cobwebbed. (He would never let her clean it, saying 'twas unnecessary labor.)

She stole softly around by the rear of the smithy. But when she had turned her second corner, she started back with a cry of fear. That monstrous Kit Rood, with a face like terror's self, stood half crouched there, shrinking from her.

"His wife!" he cried hoarsely. "For God's sake, don't touch——"

But she had fallen back in a panic, and was breathlessly running back the way she had come.

"David!" she screamed. "David!"

The sharp sound arrested Sir Francis some hundred yards away.

Every terrified moment Dorcas expected to hear Kit's footsteps behind her, and to feel his hot breath on her neck. And indeed, she did hear him swearing and crashing through the standing tobacco-stalks; but with fainter and fainter noises. Kit was running in the opposite direction—away from the smithy.

To whip around the left wall, through the open doorway, into the forge-house, was the act of an instant. E'en in her agonized flight, Dorcas was pierced by the thought that David Adoniram had neither let himself be heard, nor let himself be seen. Gentle Heaven! was't possible she had so estranged him that he cared nothing at all for what became of her!

But with her first step across the threshold she knew the answer to that.

Her husband lay stretched face-downward on the floor between the anvil and the forge, his left hand doubled under him, his right outflung toward the pile of new iron, where something smoked and smouldered, and now and again gleamed redly reflecting the moving flames i' the furnace.

"Davie, Davie, Davie!" she cried; and called him by another name, too, as she flung herself down on the floor beside him and lifted his head. "Oh, God!" Yon terrible death-mask that burst on her vision drove the life almost from her own heart.

For an instant she thought that Kit had killed him. A wild thirst for justice flooded her. Her womanly gentleness stripped away like a garment. She became her own iron father's second self incarnate. But she flashed quick eyes over her husband's back—no blood, no wound. She felt his face his rigid arm, his clenched fist—cold, cold.

"But—what—" she stammered.

Her dilated gaze fell upon the weapon toward which David Adoniram's reach extended. The litter around it still smoked. New forged! But—but——

But she had heard David's hammer a mere moment ago! And with *that* in his grip, no ten Kit Roods, cowardly hounds, could have— And David's hands, his face— She swiftly felt the flesh of his back. Yea, his very body was cold!

A fearful anticipation began to dawn upon her 'gainst which she fought with all her strength. Straining to the utmost, she half lifted, half turned that dead weight, disclosing the pool of blood, and revealing the source of it in her husband's left breast.

The whole elapsing interval—from her flight yonder, to her dread here—had consumed no sixty seconds.

"He has slain—himself," she whispered in a daze.

But when she had crept over to the very weapon, had comprehended how it was quite bright and unstained, had turned it and read its inscription o' this side as o' the other, the naked truth broke upon her in its bitter entirety.

Rudely scratched into one surface, as into the other, appeared the words with which sword-makers, like other craftsmen, make sign of their skill—

M E · F E C I T ·

was deeply graven into the uppermost flat—

DAVID ADONIRAM

into the reverse.

I was made (spoke the sword) *of David Adoniram.*

YEARS afterwards, when the various episodes i' *The Thrust* had been pieced together to a history—from what that cur Rood had betrayed; or from what Sir Francis, old Beauchamp, Sedley, or the Scotch factor had let fall—it was hotly denied by the men, and as obdurately affirmed by the women i' the province, that the dead smith had thus meant to point the relentless course to his own young wife. His fanaticism had aimed at *Sir Francis*, swore the males; could, by heaven, have impossibly squinted any otherwise!

But to Dorcas, at that moment—whatever the truth on it!—yon horrid invention carried over words from the dead, uttering three unescapable pronouncements: Her husband had been mortally hurt for *her* sin. He had been done to death by *her* admirer. He had survived of his own choice only just long enough to forge for *her* this grim admonition——

It needed scarcely the resurgent memory of her Davie's past kindness that now came over her in a wave; his unswerving fidelity; his uprightness; his snatching of her worthless poor life and honor at risk of his own, to make her reach forth a shrinking hand toward yon cruel weapon——

Sir Francis' rushing form, hard-breathing, darkened the doorway. But he had come too late, as her broken sob informed.

A moment the young rakehell stood smitten to ice. Then he fell on his knees beside her—

"Dorcas, Dorcas!" he cried in terror. "Good God—no, no, no!"

He reached out a hand to pluck forth the blade, his own white face contorted with a madness of grief. But at sight of the devilish thing's shape, he recoiled, with his hands to his eyes.

"*Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa,*" he exclaimed passionately, stumbling to his feet. "Oh, Christ, oh, Jesus, my sin, my horrible sin! Dorcas, little Dorcas; I loved you. I would have given my life for you, my sister, my sister——"

It needed no brutal spawn o' hell of Kit Rood's sort, to witness a thrust that had been sped at last into Frank Vaux's own heart.

A HIDEOUS, tragic mesh-work, yon matter of *The Thrust* (God save us all from the like!) in which the wretched feet of four human sinners, once entangled, dragged inevitably downward till all four had entered into their ruin, as far as yawned, at least, upon this life o' the flesh. How young Sir Francis, now bitterly free of his promise, sought out the shuddering villain of this piece, Kit Rood, slapped his muzzle for him i' public, drew on him then, and ran him through the body, demands hardly to be dwelt on. Remains only to tell of Sir Francis' own metamorphosis, now scarcely incredible:

As he stepped away from Rood's body, that lay sprawled there in front of a tavern, he propped his rapier against a stone watertrough, crashed his heel down on it, and snapped it in two.

"I am done with that," he said gloomily, "forever."

Old Beauchamp, watching silently with the rest of a little crowd, approached and put his arm about the young man's shoulders.

"Well, Frank," he said, after a pause. Certes, it was hard to speak words of comfort in a case like this. "Well, Frank, you must not——"

But Sir Francis interrupted him.

"Mr. Beauchamp," he said abruptly, "I'm in no mind to speak business. But I see my factor coming hither. Will you see that he follows me to my manor?"

"Why, surely. But wouldn't ye rather that I came along home wi' you?"

"No, I'd prefer not, if you would excuse me. There's a ship reported as sighted, and I have packing to do for her."

"You're for England?"

"Your pardon," said Sir Francis. "You'll deliver my message?" And he turned away, mounted his horse, and was soon out of sight.

It came out presently through the Scotch factor, after the ship had gone bearing Sir Francis with her, that the young cavalier had left orders to sell all his holdings: plantation, manor, Africans and all; and to dispatch the money in a draft on a foreign bank to him. And not to London, neither, nor to Whitehall!

"But where's the draft for?" inquired old Beauchamp, concerned. "Come, ye'll tell me that?"

"Well," responded the Presbyterian factor sourly, "it's no great matter if I do. For I doubt we'll never see the young man i' this country any more, nor his money, neither. The draft's on a Lombard banker in Rome."

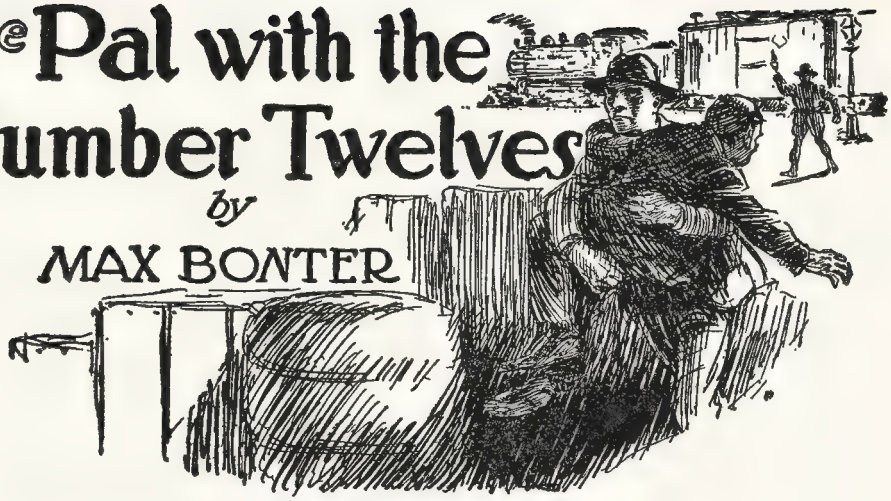
"Frank's a Papist," said old Beauchamp thoughtfully. "He'll buy himself an absolution."

But in a matter of six months or a year, rumor reached old Beauchamp through the Governor, Sir William Berkeley, that, though Sir Francis *had* had an audience of the Holy Father, he had not received entire absolution by any means. Or if he had, he had added a harsh penance of his own accord; for he had entered into novitiate in a Trappist monastery.

The Pal with the Number Twelves

by

MAX BONTER



Author of "The Life of Riley," "The Last Trip Down," etc.

"BROOKLYN JOE" was a little runt of a man and it was not hard for him to look unconcerned, because passersby rarely favored him with much attention. Beneath his apparent unconcern, however, there lurked a strong feeling of uneasiness resulting from his speculation as to just what the owner of the huge feet might be. Those feet actually fascinated him. Up and down the long station platform they tramped with monotonous regularity, each footfall in Joe's guilty consciousness seeming to express a threat of law.

The particular law that was giving Joe much concern at the moment was a certain statute on the books of the Lone Star State that provides a penalty up to and including eleven months and twenty-nine days for vagrancy. Joe was on his way to Winter quarters in "wet" New Orleans and he was thus in no mood to establish a year's compulsory residence in the arid clime of Texas.

Therefore he surveyed with increasing, though well-concealed alarm the measured tread of the ponderous feet along the railroad station platform. Such extremities, he reasoned, could not fittingly be owned excepting by males of the railroad "bull" or marshal type.

With assumed indifference Joe studied the characteristics of the formidable figure that rose above the marching feet. While the torso, arms, shoulders, neck and head seemed to have been fashioned thoroughly in proportion to the massive architecture of the lower extremities, nevertheless Joe's penetration was suddenly balked by the man's eyes. They did not look like enemy eyes at all. They were pale gray, very mild and unchallenging, with almost a hint of sadness in their misty depths. The hobo was frankly stumped by the absence of a hostile glare or a gleam of menace or that set look of pugnaciousness that almost invariably betrays the countenance of a servant of John Law.

"I'd like ta know w'at dat bloke's a-eyein' me up fer," muttered the hobo uneasily to himself.

He had almost decided upon taking up a less conspicuous post while awaiting the arrival of a train when the huge feet paused in their promenade, hesitated and then walked directly toward him.

"Excuse me, but do you live around here?"

The big man's voice was so mild, mannerly and free from offense that Brooklyn Joe was nonplused. Nevertheless the very nature of the question engendered suspicion. The hobo, quickly searching the gray eyes that were bent inquiringly upon him, cautiously parried.

"Naw— Can't say I do, mister."

"Can you tell me, then," continued the stranger courteously, "how I can get a freight train out of here?"

Joe hesitated. This seemed to be an adroit attempt to draw him into a trap.

"The Pal with the Number Twelves," copyright, 1922, by Max Bonter.

"Wait till one comes in," he returned noncommittally, "an' den git on it."

A wan smile crept into the big man's patient eyes.

"I've been waiting some time," he went on quietly.

Curiosity began to flicker in Joe's eyes. The stranger possessed none of the earmarks of a "bull," and yet neither his speech nor his apparel gave any indications of the road.

"Where ya bound fer?" questioned the hobo suddenly.

"I'm trying to get back to New York."

"N' Yawk, hey? My boig's at de udder end o' de bridge."

"Brooklyn?"

"Sure t'ing."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the big man cordially. "It seems I've actually met with a fellow townsman at last! You know what they call the 'road' pretty well, I take it?"

"Been on it fer twenty years," grinned Joe shamelessly.

"Now, then," pursued the other eagerly, "what would be the best course for me to adopt in order to get back to New York?"

The old hobo's keen eyes darted speculatively over the questioner's person.

"Fer a guy dat's broke, ya mean?"

"Yes. I am practically without funds."

"Well, ya c'd ship outa Galveston."

"What do you mean by 'ship'?"

"Y'ur sure green, ain't ya? I mean git a job passin' coal or undressin' spuds in de cook's galley."

"Are you bound that way yourself?"

"I'm goin' ta Houston an den ta N' Orleans."

"Could you let me travel with you as far as Houston?"

Brooklyn Joe hesitated. His long experience on the road had cured him of the "buddy" habit. Wise old hoboes travel alone. However, in this instance Joe's curiosity had been thoroughly aroused, There was something exceedingly strange about this quiet and innocent big man that he desired if possible to fathom.

"I'll take ya down ta Houston," he agreed generously. "Frum dere it's on'y a jump inta Galveston. Ya gotta watch y'urself, dough. I don't offen double up wit' nobody. W'at's y'ur name?"

"Samuel Brickman."

"Mine's Joe Davis. Dey call me Brooklyn Joe."

"Are you hungry, Mr. Davis?" asked Brickman solicitously.

"Is a nigger black?" asked Joe with a grin.

The big man drew two one-dollar bills from his pocket.

"I take it, Mr. Davis," he ventured smilingly, "that we have for the time being entered into a partnership. Therefore I divide with you my meager capital. Let us accordingly eat. I also confess an appetite."

Joe's new-found pal handed him one of the bills and the old hobo's eyes glowed with pleasure.

"Brick," he solemnly asseverated, "I been on de road twenty years, but I ain't never seen a squarer split dan dis. Y'ur sure de right kin' uv a buddy. Shake."

IN A box car loaded with baled cotton rode Brickman and Brooklyn Joe. Both side doors and one of the end doors were locked and sealed, but the men had effected entry through the other end door, which they had found open. Brickman had encountered much difficulty in squeezing his huge frame through the small aperture, but the feat had at length been accomplished. Now he lay sprawled out at full length across the bales while his little partner, with a bowl of chilli con carne in his stomach and a couple of cheese sandwiches in his pocket, lolled contentedly by his side.

"Mus' be 'bout twenty miles frum Houston," grunted Joe at last. "W'at's de matter, Brick?"

The train had pulled on to a siding to permit the passage of an express. Brickman had suddenly sat upright and was fumbling nervously about the bales in the semi-darkness.

"I fear I have lost my wallet," was the big man's anxious reply. "It must have slipped from my pocket and fallen down between the bales."

"W'at ya mean—y'ur pocketbook? I t'ought ya said ya was broke?"

"It contains no money," replied Brickman. "Documents—much more valuable to me than money."

Joe snorted suspiciously. That a pocketbook could contain anything more valuable than money was incomprehensible to him. Brickman struck a match and began peering down between the bales in an effort to locate his missing property.

"Brick! Ya —— —— fool! Ain't ya got any sense in y'ur dome? Dis is cotton! Ya'll set de —— car afire!"

At the sudden torrent of profane epithets hurled at him by his angry partner Brickman swung about with a protest on his lips. The head of the burning match dropped between two of the bales. A thin spire of white smoke immediately shot upward and began to fill the confined space with its strong and pungent odor.

"Beat it!" shouted Joe hoarsely. "Beat it quick!"

"Can't we move the bales and put it out?" asked Brickman in an awe-struck tone.

"Move, ya simp! It'd take a derrick ta move dem bales—dey weighs half a ton. Besides, dey's loaded too close tagedder ta move. Beat it, or we'll git smuddered!"

For a moment Brickman hesitated, but it soon became apparent to his mind that moving the bales was out of the question. The glowing match head had dropped to the bottom of the car between two of the bales and the fire was eating its way upward from beneath. Already the car was rapidly filling with the suffocating fumes.

"Beat it!" screamed Joe again. "If we git caught we'll git five years!"

With a groan Brickman turned about and endeavored to make hasty egress through the little end door. Its narrow frame was very inadequate to afford hurried passage to a man of his size. He squeezed and squirmed and floundered, seemingly unable to withdraw himself farther than the waist. Joe coughed the fumes from his lungs and began pounding frantically upon his partner's imprisoned buttocks.

"Ya wanta leave me smudder in here?" he shouted frenziedly. "Ya great big ——!"

Spurred on by his little partner's frightful profanity no less than by his grave peril, the big man finally wrenched himself free and clambered clumsily down the ladder to the railroad track. Gasping for breath Brooklyn Joe tumbled quickly after him. A big cloud of white smoke began to float warningly out of the little end door. Several of the stalled train's crew could be seen loitering about in the distance and it would not be many seconds before they would discover the fire.

Paralleling the railroad track was a desolate looking strip of country to which Joe pointed, facing Brickman with a desperate look in his eyes.

"Can't we explain the matter to the train men?" asked the latter in a troubled voice.

"Explain ——!" exploded Joe savagely. "A Texas judge don't take no explainin's. I'm on me way."

Without more ado the old hobo darted off westward through the marsh at a rapid pace. His bulky partner, with a final anxious glance at the smoke cloud that began to hover about the doomed car, began to follow him with as much speed as his heavy frame could muster. Scarcely had the fugitives gained a hundred yards from the scene when one of the brakemen discovered the fire, and the loud shouting of this man brought the other members of the crew to his assistance.

Two of them promptly started in pursuit of the fleeing culprits; but after splashing their way for a short distance through the marsh they abandoned the chase in disgust and returned to aid their companions, who had split the train and isolated the burning car, from which a big volume of smoke was pouring.

Neither of the fugitives paused until fully half a mile of marsh land lay between them and the stalled freight train; and then Brooklyn Joe, halting to regain some needed breath and noting with relief that the pursuit had ceased, indignantly awaited the arrival of Brickman. The big man came lumbering along some seconds afterward, his great feet sloshing heavily through the ooze and spattering it copiously over his trousers. Panting heavily, the men cast apprehensive looks toward the scene of their late unintentional arson.

"Dis part uv Texas ain't gonna be healt'y fer ya an' me, Brick," was Joe's gloomy comment. "We gotta keep movin' or git jugged. If we don't git stung wit' a mocksin in dis —— swamp, we'll hit de Sap 'bout two miles furder west. Dat'll take us inta Houston. If ya hadn't split y'ur dough wit' me, Brick, I'd can de partnership right now, 'cause nobody but a —— —— fool 'ud ever strike a match in a car uv cotton. Ain't ya wise ta dat, hey?"

Brickman turned reproachful eyes upon his fiery little partner.

"Mr. Davis," he replied in a melancholy voice, "while I greatly regret having involved you in my unintentional law-breaking, nevertheless I must admit that I am even more distressed by your inexcusable

and frightful profanity. It deeply shocks and grieves me."

Brooklyn Joe was struck suddenly speechless. Without another word he turned about and led the way through the marsh.

"W'at kin' uv a elphunt is dis I got on me han's, hey?" he muttered disgustedly below his breath.

"DERE'S some eats fer ya, Brick," said Joe sympathetically. "I know ya ain't wise ta de moochin' game, an' I ain't gonna let ya starve."

The big man was very much disappointed over having failed to connect with a ship to New York via Galveston. Brooklyn Joe had generously piloted his partner to the latter city; but there the stewards and engineers of the steamship lines, having looked dubiously over Brickman's colossal person, had been unimpressed with his offer of services in exchange for passage.

Accordingly with a resigned sigh the old hobo had brought his partner back to Houston, secreting him in a "jungles" on the outskirts of the city. The burning of the cotton car had been reported to the authorities and Joe was apprehensive of Brickman's detection on account of the fact that the latter's unusual size and appearance had undoubtedly been remarked upon by the train crew.

Brickman gratefully received the proferred food.

"Mr. Davis," he acknowledged, "while your language is ofttimes reprehensible, nevertheless I have discovered that you have a sincere and loyal nature. You have been exceedingly generous with me."

"Can de bokays, Brick. I'm on'y a bum, but I'll do de best I kin fer ya. I'll take ya wit' me ta Beaumont. It's on'y a jump frum dere to Port Arter. Prob'ly ya kin jump a oil tanker frum dere ta N' Yawk. We gotta watch ourselves, dough. De bulls is atter us. We'll lay here till dark an' den hit a freight fer de East."

That night an empty fruit car carried the strange pair eastward over the Southern Pacific. Reclining on a pile of straw while the train sped onward through the blackness, Joe wondered much concerning the queer partner with whom Fate had unaccountably supplied him. While the big man seemed to be a boob in the broadest sense of the term and while on the surface there did not appear to be the slightest sympathy between them, nevertheless Joe undeniably felt the presence of some intangible bond.

"Guess I'm sorry fer de bloke—dat's all," was the only conclusion he could arrive at with respect to the problem.

Accordingly on the following morning Joe left the train with his partner at the big oil town of Beaumont.

"It ain't much outa me way, Brick," he said apologetically, as if ashamed of his weakness in prolonging their partnership. "I'll take ya over ta Port Arter."

The hobo then "battered" the town of Beaumont and shared with his partner as usual the results of the forage.

"In times past I myself have cast some crums upon the waters," murmured Brickman thankfully while he devoured the food, "and now they are being returned to me in my hour of need."

Brooklyn Joe responded with a deprecating shrug.

"Aw, dis ain't nuttin', Brick," he modestly declared. "Ya oughta seen de set-down I bummed in Dallas on T'anksgivin' Day—ev'ryt'in' frum clam cocktails ta nuts, wit' a dime frum de biscuit shooter t'rown in fer a pack uv butts."

The big man glanced curiously at his partner and sighed.

"I gotta bum a pair uv kicks purty soon, too," went on the old hobo with an appraising look at his worn footwear. "W'at ya gonna do when *dem* gives out, Brick?" he continued with a grin, glancing at the gigantic leathern creations that housed the extremities of his companion, and which already were beginning to exhibit signals of distress.

"Truly I am blessed with great understandings," admitted Brickman, while a flicker of amusement brightened his sad gray eyes. "It has always been necessary for me to have shoes made especially to order."

"It's a sure bet ya'll never bum a pair ta fit ya," grinned Joe.

In Port Arthur an adverse Fate confronted Brickman with disappointments similar to those he had suffered in Galveston. The crews of all tankers in port were filled up and there was even a substantial "waiting list" of seafaring men in readiness for the several more ships that were expected to arrive.

"I don't know w'at I'm gonna do wit' ya,

Brick," said the hobo moodily, "unless I take ya wit' me ta N' Orleens. Dat's a big town an' dere's plenty uv sailin's outa dere fer N' Yawk. Ya sure oughta cop a ship dere, Brick."

As they proceeded eastward toward New Orleans Brickman's great size and his ignorance of the road were a heavy tax on his little partner's ingenuity for keeping out of trouble. Time and again they escaped by a narrow margin from being apprehended by railroad detectives. Joe's ready wit and his great resourcefulness, combined with his thorough knowledge of the methods of clandestine travel, were unceasingly called into play to help the big man along. Had he been unhampered by his partner's presence Joe would have disdained traveling by the tedious and dangerous slow freight route.

His small and inconspicuous person would, on the other hand, have flitted across country on the blind baggage or on the rods beneath a fast merchandise—his lynx eyes ever alert to see trouble and his swift legs always competent to take him away from it. Handicapped as he was with Brickman, however, such rapid transit methods were out of the question. The big man was slow-footed, clumsy and conspicuous, and the only feasible way to get him over the road was to put him into a gondola or a box car and trust to Fate to keep him undiscovered and uncaught.

Notwithstanding these things, Joe stuck loyally by Brickman. Not alone this, but the old and hardened hobo, in deference to the other's oft-expressed views upon the subject of profanity, had actually pulled the teeth out of many of his most characteristic utterances while they were together; but often when alone on foraging expeditions he would let loose a violent string of expletives as a relief to his overcharged spirit.

"Dat —— —— elphunt! How did I ever come ta git gardeen fer a big cheese like dat? De on'y way fer him ta git back ta de boig is ta walk."

These periodic explosions would make Joe feel better and he would then feed Brickman and look after his welfare with the assiduity of a nurse-maid. One look from the sad and patient eyes of his charge seemed to melt all the rage in his heart and supplant it with brotherly regard.

One raw and drizzly evening the partners descended from a train in the Algiers yards and looked across the Mississippi at New Orleans. The lights of the Crescent City sent their beckoning beams alluringly over the turbid river. The two travelers were both cold and hungry.

"Joe," asked Brickman suddenly, "do you know what evening this is?"

It was the first time his partner had addressed him familiarly, and the hobo wonderingly pondered.

"Why, Brick, it's Chrismus Eve, ain't it?" he exclaimed at last.

"It is," replied the big man with a sad note in his voice.

"Chrismus Eve," repeated Joe dismally, "an' us on de bum fer fair. Dis is a good night fer rus'lin' de main stem, Brick, but I can't do nuttin' till we git acrost dis crick. Dey's on'y two ways uv makin' it fer guys dat's broke—swim or jump a car float. De car float game is risky, Brick. Dey's always bulls waitin' on de udder side, but we gotta take de chance."

Brooklyn Joe piloted his partner to the docks and the men stowed themselves away on board one of the ponderous car ferries, laden with two strings of freight cars, that was on the point of departing for the city. The float swung slowly into the sluggish stream and headed for the other shore.

"Now, Brick," cautioned Joe while the vessel was being docked, "de enjine up dere is waitin' ta pull off de cars. She's on dis side, which means she'll pull dis string foist. Hang right onta dese han' grips on dis side uv de string. De bull stan's on de udder side. Ya kin see him over dere under dat street light. De train'll go pas' de bull wit' us on de side dat's away frum him, so de chances is he won't spot us."

A uniformed figure could be discerned standing sentry-like at a patrol box about fifty yards ashore. The engine was promptly backed and coupled to the string, which presently began to move shoreward. Brooklyn Joe, clinging to the hand grips, peered cautiously over the top of the car at the officer while the train was being drawn past. Brickman was stationed on the car ahead. It seemed as if the partners were about to be successful in their clandestine entry into the city, when suddenly and unfortunately for them the policeman, who had stood inactive while the string was passing by, walked to the other side of the street behind the last car of the train and glanced vigilantly ahead. Brooklyn Joe's small person,

that was squeezed tight against the side of the car, might have escaped the officer's scrutiny in the distance and the semi-darkness—but not so Brickman's, whose huge back bulged into the perspective like a promontory. The policeman started forward at a run and began to overhaul the train, that was moving slowly.

"Jump, Brick!" shouted Joe warningly. "Beat it—we're spotted!"

It was a section of the city devoted chiefly to the storage of cotton and sugar and a long dim line of warehouses loomed ahead through the shadows. The two men leaped from the train and began to run rapidly toward the shelter of these buildings.

"Stop!" commanded the officer sharply. "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

Brickman was seventy yards in advance of the law and Joe was ten yards behind Brickman when the policeman fired.

"Brick!" gasped the little hobo, striving to overhaul his partner. "I'm plugged!"

With a half-articulate cry the big man swung about, seized Joe in his great arms and dashed forward with his burden into the dark and sheltering maze of warehouses. Then, after he had assured himself that there was no longer danger of pursuit, he set Joe down and began to examine his wound beneath the glow of a convenient gas lamp. No pedestrians frequented this neighborhood, which was practically deserted after nightfall. Brickman discovered that the bullet had plowed through the muscular tissues of the left arm, leaving the bone apparently uninjured. Using his handkerchief as a tourniquet, he tore a strip from his shirt and skilfully bound up the wound, effectively stanching the flow of blood.

"Brick," said the little hobo, "it's de foist time I knew ya had guts."

"You'll have to go to a hospital, Joe."

"Nix on dat stuff. Ya ain't wised up yet, Brick. Don't ya know dey'd wanta know all about de shootin'? Dey'd not'fy de cops an' I'd git jugged."

Brickman heaved a sad sigh.

"I begin to realize some of the injustices in the enforcement of law," he muttered to himself. "But what can we do, Joe? You'll have to receive attention of some sort."

"I know a joint where I kin lay low till dis heals up, Brick. I'll git out on de stem an' do a li'l' moochin'. C'm on wit' me."

Brickman carefully wiped the telltale bloodstains from his partner's outer clothing and the men proceeded into the city. Joe's pilotage landed them in the environs of Exchange Alley, where the Winter tide of Northern vagrants was at its flow. Saloon windows poured forth a glaring welcome to the reveling crowds and their doors were engaged in a continual swing.

"Dis way, Brick."

Joe and his partner passed through a dirty doorway and entered a large and smoke-hazed apartment where dozens of frowsy forms were lounging about on chairs and benches and filling the air with a hoarse and quarrelsome volume of sound. Brickman looked sorrowfully over the faces of the unfortunate occupants of this sordid den and immediately his gaze returned to his plucky little partner who, suffering from loss of blood as well as hunger and cold, had sunk weakly into a chair beside the fire. A sudden resolve kindled in the big man's eyes.

"Rest here for a few minutes, Joe," he said encouragingly. "I won't be long."

Striding hurriedly through the noisy streets, he paused at last before a pawnbroking establishment where he stood a moment, surveying the forlorn array of ticketed and unredeemed pledges that offered themselves to the heedless crowds.

"Martha," he murmured sadly, "I would walk barefoot and go hungry before I would do this for my own sake."

From a tiny golden locket he drew a miniature photograph of a woman's profile. After gazing for some seconds at the serene features depicted there, he replaced the photograph carefully in his pocket and took the trinket into the pawnbroker's shop.

"GITTIN' plugged is sure de real goods, Brick," murmured the old hobo happily. "I didn't know ya was a noice."

Brickman had rented a little room away from the sordid neighborhood of Exchange Alley and Brooklyn Joe was spending his Christmas in a clean and comfortable bed with his big partner sitting by his side. On a table near by were bandages, antiseptic dressings, oranges, cake and a tiny pail of excellent coffee that Brickman had brought from the French market. Through the days that followed the latter gave additional proofs of his nursing capabilities and Joe's wounded arm soon healed.

After the expenditure of the ten dollars he had raised by pledging the locket, the big

man occasionally was able to make a dollar or two handling fruit on the docks; although the large number of hoboes wintering in the city made competition in such labor very keen. Between times he paid many visits to the shipping offices with a view to procuring passage to New York; but his extraordinary courtesy, instead of facilitating such end, acted strongly against it. His demeanor stamped him indubitably as one quite unused to menial toil.

On the first day that Joe was able to leave the room he and Brickman walked together about the city. Canal Street—a wide and popular promenade that boasted a Broadway-like flow of travel—was nevertheless neither so crowded nor so heedless of personalities as to obscure the passing incongruity of the huge, seedy-looking man and his seedy little partner. Many curious glances were cast toward the pair. Suddenly the little hobo clutched Brickman by the arm and whispered a hoarse warning:

"Toin inta de alley, Brick. Keep on goin'. Don't look behind ya."

They were passing the mouth of Exchange Alley at the moment, and presently the dingy little street had carried them away from the main thoroughfare and afforded them disreputable sanctuary from the prying gaze.

"Brick," muttered Joe solemnly, with an anxious look in the direction whence they had come, "we gotta blow dis town. Did ya lamp dat harness bull dat was follerin' us? He was de cop dat plugged me, Brick. He was sizin' up bot' ya an' me. I don't t'ink he'd 'member me—it was too dark—but he sure wouldn't fergit a elephunt like ya, Brick—'speshully wit' dem hoofs. Seein' de bot' uv us togedder made him scratch his dome. It's de jug fer bot' uv us, Brick, if we git nabbed. We'd better hop over ta Mobile. Maybe ya kin ship outa dere. Anyway," concluded the old hobo with a grin, "y'ur gittin' closeter ta de boig all de time, Brick. Keep dem number twelves movin' an' ya'll be dere atter a while."

"Let us depart, then, Joe," agreed Brickman instantly. "I am satisfied, especially, as you have said, on account of our travels bringing us continually nearer New York."

Joe laid great stress upon the inadvisability of their attempting to board a train in the city yards, insisting that they undertake the long and weary hike out to the first water tank.

"I'm tellin' ya, Brick," he asserted solemnly while they plodded along over the ties, "we're up agen a bad road an' dis is de woist d'vishun, frum here ta Mobile. Dese shacks is all heeled an' dey'll plug ya quicker'n scat. In de old days when dey foist put black firemen on dis road, dey say de hog-heads usta crack dem on de dome wit' a shovel or a monkey wrench an' den t'row dem in de fire box. Dat didn't leave no trace uv dem fer evidence. D'ya b'lieve dat, Brick?"

Brickman shuddered.

"Such atrocity on the part of so-called civilized beings is almost incredible," he muttered. "Was there really proof of those things, Joe?"

"Dat's w'at I'm tellin' ya, Brick. Dere wasn't no proof. Dey went up in smoke—see?"

The men boarded a train at nightfall, but an irascible brakeman ruthlessly ditched them after they had progressed about twenty miles. A raw, cold wind blew pitilessly over the Gulf and began to chill their insufficiently clothed bodies.

"Keep on hikin', Brick," chattered Joe warily. "We're in old Missus Sippi now, where dey han' ya t'ree mont's in de chain gang fer vag. De name uv dis town is Lookout—so look out, Brick."

The big man sighed and silently followed his chattering little partner until, beyond the confines of the hostile town of Lookout, Miss., they reached a drawbridge spanning an inlet from the Gulf to one of the many tiny bayous for which the Gulf coast is famous. Light shone through the little window of the bridge-tender's shanty and Joe knocked boldly at the door.

"Come in!" was the official's cheery invitation. "Naow, yo'all set ryght daown bah the far an' wahm yo'seffs," he continued with breezy hospitality after the shivering wanderers had stepped inside.

The man proved to be a Creole. Brickman conversed with him fluently in both his ancestral tongues, which seemed to afford him great pleasure. He was an unusually tall man and his feet were very big—seemingly as big as Brickmans'—which astonishing circumstance was readily noted by both the partners, although neither made any comment upon the fact until the bridge-tender left the shanty with the announced intention of going on an errand to his home, that stood at the westerly end of the bridge.

Joe thereupon picked up and examined a pair of heavy brogans that stood in a corner behind a coal scuttle. Their proportions were obviously such that even the phenomenal extremities of Brickman could hardly fail to find accommodation therein.

"Brick!" exclaimed the little hobo suddenly. "Shove on dem kicks an' we'll beat it. Dey's as big as y'urs, Brick. Ya'll never git a better chance. De guy couldn't chase us. He couldn't leave de bridge."

With eagerness and excitement sparkling in his eyes, Joe looked expectantly at his partner; but the latter returned Joe's look with an incredulous stare that gradually grew into one of the utmost sternness.

"Is it possible, Joe," he inquired in horrified accents, "that you are actually counseling me to *steal?*"

There followed a moment's embarrassing silence in the little shanty, during which Joe's eyes fell guiltily before the accusing glance of his indignant partner. The hobo sheepishly replaced the shoes where he had found them.

"Brick," he muttered, "y'u're sure a funny jigger. W'at was dem lingoes ya was talkin' wit' de guy?"

"French and Spanish. This man is what they call a 'Creole,' Joe—an offspring of the old Spanish-French settlers who inhabited this part of the country years ago. He tells me that his mother was educated in a convent and that she taught him these languages when he was a little child at her knee. That would account for the singular purity with which he speaks them. His English, on the other hand, is very colloquial and replete with Southern barbarisms, on account of illiterate associates."

"W'at's a guy like ya doin' on de bum, Brick? Can't ya git a job?"

"I had a job, Joe," replied the big man with a sad and reminiscent smile, "in the wilds of Durango. I have not before told you of the sad experience, because there are certain phases of it you would not understand, and the recital of which would only reopen old wounds that have scarcely healed. However, I shall skim lightly over the facts. The Mexican Government accused me of spreading propaganda of a revolutionary nature among the Indians. My effects were confiscated, I was imprisoned and finally deported to the border. The New York people who were backing me appeared to attach credence to the charge against me, because they withdrew their support and left me without funds. I am on my way back to New York to disprove the ridiculous charge; although unfortunately certain documentary proofs in the form of affidavits that I had succeded in gathering, and that I had in my possession, have been destroyed."

"Ya mean, Brick," pursued Joe sympathetically, "dat dey was boined up in dat car uv cotton wit' y'ur pocketbook?"

"Yes, Joe."

"But couldn't ya git de N' Yawk guys ta send ya carfare so's ya c'd git back, Brick?"

The big man resolutely shook his head.

"I stand convicted upon hearsay," he replied sadly. "The newspapers are largely responsible for that, through lack of knowledge of the true facts. Nevertheless I scorn the thought of asking aid of those who, without even having given me a hearing, are disposed to hold me guilty. I prefer to continue suffering the hardships of the road."

A look of such quiet strength and immeasurable determination shone in the pale eyes of his partner that Joe was momentarily abashed.

"Brick," he remarked after a reflective pause, "ya never told me where ya got de coin ta hold me up in N' Orleans."

"I pawned a little trinket that I had, Joe."

"Ya musta t'ought a lot uv dat t'ing, Brick. Ya wouldn't hock it fer eats when ya was hungry, or fer a pair uv kicks when y'ur toes is stickin' out. But ya hocked it fer me. W'at was it, Brick?"

"A locket," replied Brickman reluctantly. "A keepsake from my deceased wife, Joe."

"Dead, ya mean?"

"Yes."

For a few moments Joe silently and reflectively watched the fire beams radiating from the little stove.

"Brick," he muttered, "I'm on'y a bum, but I'll see dat ya git back ta N' Yawk."

The Creole returned carrying a pail that he set over the fire. He then took plates and spoons from a little cupboard and presently served each of his guests with a heaping dishful of savory lamb stew. While he ate, Joe studiously avoided his partner's eyes. Having thus warmed and fed the two wanderers, their generous host was nevertheless prepared to go to still greater lengths to accommodate them.

"Ah daon't reckon there'll be any mo'

schoonahs gwine threw tonyght, boys," he regretfully prophesied. "The only way fo' me to stop a train is to swing the bridge. The next tank is fo'teen mahles and it's too bittah a nyght fo' yo'all to walk so fah. Of co'se," he added cautiously, "I'd sho'ly lose mah job if this was faound aout."

Brickman hastened to protest against such risky generosity, but the bridge-tender's mind had already been made up. His warm Creole nature had been stirred to fraternity by the soft accents of his parental tongues. It was midnight before the wire brought notice of an approaching freight train. Brickman obligingly threw the weight of his great body against the turning lever and the drawbridge swung slowly about until the red block signal was set against the oncoming engineer. The heavy train ground impotently against its set brakes and finally stopped about a hundred yards distant.

"Naow swing huh back, boys, and then run fo' it," directed the bridge-tender.

Gradually the big structure swung again into its proper alinement, automatically signaling a clearance to the waiting engineer.

"Good luck, boys! *Adios, amigo!*"

The Creole warmly pressed Brickman's hand. A minute later the two wanderers were alongside the train, which was already beginning to get up speed.

"We gotta ride de bumpers, Brick. Dis is a fast moichandise an' dere ain't nuttin' open."

Joe swung himself quickly into the dangerous perch between two of the cars, planting his feet on the drawheads; while Brickman, who was quite unused to this perilous form of travel, with difficulty succeeded in similarly placing himself between two of the following cars. The fast freight fled through Mississippi at forty miles an hour into the teeth of a chill southeast wind that bit through the men's scanty clothing and benumbed their frames. Half an hour later the train suddenly began to slow down and over the tops of the cars, with a lantern in his hand, a burly brakeman came sauntering. He peered angrily downward at a deadhead passenger whom he discerned standing between two high box cars.

"Git offa thar!" he thundered.

"D' ya wanta moider a guy?" screamed Joe.

"Git offa thar!" repeated the brakeman brutally. He swung his heavy signal lantern at Joe's head and the hobo immediately jumped. At that moment the train happened to be skirting a sandy strip of coast and the spot where Joe landed fortunately was clear of rocks and such other obstructions as would have endangered his fall. He turned a complete somersault on the sand, staggered dazedly to his feet and then, standing in the middle of the track, he let fly a furious volley of curses at the merciless trainman who had ditched him. This duty ended, he bent his shivering little frame doggedly before the blast and began a weary hike toward the next water tank.

"I'M SICK uv bummin'. I wanta go ta woik."

The employment manager of the charitable institution swung about in his chair and looked keenly at the speaker, whom he observed to be a poorly dressed little man with a bulldog chin and a pair of steady eyes.

"Although jobs are scarce and applicants are many," the manager mused at length, "for a man like you I believe I can find some work. There's the right ring in your voice."

That same day Brooklyn Joe was introduced to a broom and a mop and installed as porter in a big fraternal institution in the Alabaman city of Mobile. The hobo's arm was sufficiently healed for the performance of the required tasks and a firm though belated incentive to industry seemed to possess him. He mopped and scrubbed the tiled floors and corridors with as much energy as he had formerly exerted to avoid such work, and the increasing cleanliness of the big building began to bear silent but expressive testimony to Joe's menial worth.

"Porter," said the superintendent to him one day, "your work is very satisfactory, but you'll have to pay more attention to your personal appearance. You must wear a collar and a necktie and polish your shoes. Furthermore, inasmuch as this is a Christian establishment, I hope it is unnecessary for me to say that drinking liquor in any form is not permitted among our help. The smoking of cigarets is also forbidden."

This was dismal news indeed, but Joe bore the superintendent's drastic ultimatum with fortitude. He avoided saloons, wore a collar and tie, washed and bathed regularly and devoted much time to the care of his scanty wardrobe. His bank roll gradually

assumed such proportions as he had scarcely ever dreamed of in his hobo days.

Joe's cleaning activities took him one day into the basement, where he unearthed a large store of discarded wearing apparel—old coats, shoes and trousers taken from the rooms of departed guests or gleaned from the men's lockers in the gymnasium. After having selected and set aside such articles as seemed suited to his personal wants, he began generously to consider the welfare of his less fortunate fellows. The Winter season along the Gulf coast—ordinarily so mild—had been unusually severe.

The city was filled with hoboes and itinerant working men—jobless, ill-clad, hungry and reviling the Sunny South. Joe often betook himself to the resorts where these men congregated and whenever he chanced to run across an old acquaintance he would pilot him surreptitiously back to his basement and supply him with some needed article of apparel from the discarded store. He made unceasing inquiries among these men concerning Brickman; but week after week passed by and none of those whom he interrogated recollected having met with the conspicuous big man along the road.

"Brick," he would often mutter to himself, "we was bot' headed for Mobile, so ya oughta have sense 'nuff to come here. I hope dem number twelves ain't got ya inta trouble. Dey's too big fer de road, Brick."

The superintendent of the institution began to be puzzled and annoyed by a constant stream of applicants for clothing and shoes. Several times a day these men were in the habit of intruding into his routine with their strange requests and they seemed to be both surprized and disappointed at the superintendent's curt replies to the effect that he was aware of no such articles that were being gratuitously distributed. One afternoon the official summoned Joe to his office.

"Porter," he inquired suspiciously, "can you explain anything about the clothing and shoes that are supposed to be given away in the basement? I am being greatly bothered by a constant plague of bums who invariably make this curious assertion. Why," he continued heatedly, "a fellow was just here—a great big bum as big as a truck horse, with the toes actually sticking out of his shoes! When I looked at the size of his feet I could not help wondering how on earth——"

Joe waited to hear no more. Leaving the astonished superintendent in the middle of his discourse, he rushed out of the building and began looking eagerly up and down the street. Far in the distance his gaze alighted upon the conspicuous proportions of a well-known figure.

"Brick!" he shouted joyfully, breaking into a run.

The big man was strangely altered. His huge limbs seemed to be shuffling along at a difficult and lagging gait. The worn and tattered coat hung loosely from a pair of drooping shoulders and the naked feet were clearly visible within his cracked and battered shoes. Deep, bluish hollows semicircled his pale eyes that seemed to shine with an ineffable sadness.

"Ya great big lan' crab," said Joe, catching his old partner fraternally by the arm, "ya couldn't git lost in de whole uv Nort' Ameriky wit' dem hoofs, hey? I sent out a hobo wireless fer ya, Brick. Dat kin' uv news travels fast on de road. I got a pair uv canal boats planted fer ya, but if dey don't fit ya, I'm gonna hire a shoemaker ta make ya a pair uv twelves, if I gotta corner de whole leat'er market—see?"

Brickman seemed suddenly to be tottering.

"Have you—could you defray the expense of a beef stew, Joe?" he whispered.

"Brick!" cried the little man suddenly in alarm. "——, Brick! Y'ur starvin', ain't ya?"

With a determined effort Brickman recovered some of his poise, while a ghostly smile flitted across his emaciated face.

"Alas! Joe, I have assuredly missed your kind ministrations," he responded feebly. "I confess I haven't eaten much for the past week."

"Dat means ya ain't et *nuttin'*," declared the little man positively. "Good ——!"

Ignoring the black looks cast at him by the proprietor of a near-by restaurant, Joe piloted his unfortunate partner to a table, where Brickman carefully broke his fast with a small portion of soup; and after this alimentary stimulant had reenforced his enfeebled frame, Joe conducted him to his own room in the basement of the fraternal institution where he was employed.

"Now, Brick," he said authoritatively, "I'm gonna put ya ta bed. Ya gotta have rest. I'm de noice now an' I'm gonna take care uv ya same as ya took care uv me."

Notwithstanding the big man's objections Joe quickly undressed his patient, who was in such a deplorable condition that he was scarcely able to lift a hand in his own behalf. The appearance of his broad back called forth from the hobo a sudden exclamation of amazement. From the collar bone to the waist extended a curious row of stripes—some blackish, others bluish and still others of a reddish tinge—these latter bounded by small areas of inflammation resulting from lacerated flesh.

"De chain gang!" exclaimed Joe in dismay. "I wondered why it took ya t'ree mont's ta git ta Mobile!"

" 'He was bruised for our iniquities'," quoted Brickman mournfully. "Yes, Joe, I have suffered much. I was taken from the train by a marshal in Biloxi and sentenced to three months' hard labor for vagrancy. I shudder when my mind dwells upon the incidents of that dire period. Each day we were taken forth in chains to labor upon the roads. Each night we were locked into foul and loathsome dungeons—infinitely worse than some of the places where men are wont to harbor their swine. Often I was lashed or beaten because, due to the insufficient nourishment afforded by a cup of thin soup and a piece of hard corn bread, I was unable to perform as much labor as was expected of me. When, finally, the day arrived when I was released from their brutal custody, I found myself in such a bruised and weakened state that it was with the utmost difficulty that I could proceed on my way. Some passing wanderers informed me that you were working in this establishment and that you had charge of some shoes and clothing that were being given away to the needy. Therefore, fearing further arrest and detention if I were to attempt more train-riding, with much difficulty I made my way hither on foot. The superintendent was very gruff with me when I essayed to make inquiries, which my pride accordingly forbade me to pursue further. I had determined to remain somewhere in the vicinity of the building until after working hours, hoping that you would come out on the street and that I could have opportunity to speak to you. But a benign Providence quickly sent you forth to me, Joe, when I was on the verge of collapse from starvation."

Toward the close of the short but pitiful recital the big man's voice had died to a whisper. A moment later he was asleep. Joe gazed for some time at the bruised and wasted frame of his partner and then at the few articles of tattered clothing that lay on a chair near by. With a sudden resolve burning in his breast he gathered the rags together and was about to carry them out and pitch them into an ash can. He checked this impulse, however, until he had made a search of the pockets, which produced nothing but a woman's miniature photograph and a pawn ticket.

"Brick, ya was hooked wit' a real one, wasn't ya?" he muttered admiringly to himself while he gazed upon the sweet lineaments of Brickman's deceased wife.

Due to Joe's abstinence from liquor and tobacco he had succeeded in saving about eighty dollars and the consciousness of such wealth spurred him into a course of action that was little short of munificence. From a second hand clothing dealer he procured a coat and trousers suitable for a man of Brickman's size. His own private stock of discarded goods furnished a hat, vest, shirt, socks and underwear. Nothing therefore remained to complete the big man's outfit but a pair of shoes. The little man looked dubiously at the pair he had already set aside for his partner's use and finally shook his head.

"Brick," he muttered, " 'tain't no use. I can't buy a ready-made pair ta fit ya, an' it 'ud take too long ta git ya a pair made ta order. W'at am I gonna do? De on'y pair I ever saw dat 'ud fit ya was de ones ya wouldn't swipe from de guy at de bridge."

Joe pondered some time over the shoe problem until at last the broad path of duty to his partner ran straight and clear. He bought fruit and sandwiches and placed them upon a chair within reach of the sleeping Brickman. Then he proceeded to the office and inquired for the superintendent.

"He isn't in, porter," replied an assistant. "What is it?"

"Tell de boss," said Joe tersely, "dat I've gone ta N' Orleens. I'll be back tamorrow."

BRICKMAN struggled manfully to control his emotion, but the effort seemed to be without avail. He sat in Joe's little basement room—decently clothed, a pair of number twelve shoes on his feet and clasping his dead wife's locket in his trembling hand.

"Dat's all right, Brick—dere ain't nuttin'

ta cry about. Ya hocked de t'ing fer me an' I git it back fer ya—see? De kicks didn't cost me nuttin', eeder. De bridge tenner wouldn't take a cent fer dem, Brick. I tol' him w'at ya was up against an' he said he was glad ta help ya out. Dat's sure a w'ite guy, eh, Brick? I'm glad ya didn't cop dem kicks de time I wanted ya ta. It pays ta be square wit' a guy—hey?"

"Verily," murmured the big man through his tears, "I have found more honor and gratitude among them of the hedges and the byways than among them of high places."

"Brick, ya oughta be a mishunary," said Joe jestingly.

"I am, Joe—an ex-missionary to the untutored Mexican Indians, but just now a discredited agent of the Gospel due to the political intrigues of ungodly men. The time will soon come when I shall vindicate myself of the charge against me. Nevertheless, all the hardship and suffering I have endured on the road I count as nothing when I consider the inspiration that such natures as yours, and that of our generous friend, the Creole, have given me. There is immeasurable godliness in a human heart that goes out to a brother in distress."

Joe looked for some moments into the earnest eyes of the missionary.

"Ya mean, Brick, dat a guy oughta stick ta a pal? Dat's w'at I t'ink, but dey's lots uv guys dat don't do it. Some uv dem double-cross ya."

"That's what's wrong with the world, Joe," replied Brickman sadly. "If my 'pals,' as you call them, had not forsaken me, I should not be in this predicament today."

At this juncture an office messenger knocked at the door and informed Joe that the superintendent desired to speak to him.

"Porter," said the official sternly, "your recent conduct calls for a strong reprimand. Not only have you been neglecting your duties of late, but you left the city for a day without my permission to absent yourself from your job. Moreover, I understand that you are harboring in your room a disreputable character that you pulled in from the street. The room that you occupy is for your use only and that bum must leave at once."

"But, boss," protested Joe indignantly, "dat guy ain't a bum. He's me pal. He held me up in N' Orleens when I wasn't able ta do nuttin'. I can't t'row him down like dat. D' ya want a guy ta t'row down his own pal?"

"Enough of this nonsense," replied the superintendent curtly. "This is a Christian institution and not a resort for bums. Let him find quarters elsewhere. Moreover, as an employee of this institution, you must not associate with such tramps. Conduct of this character brings discredit not only upon yourself, but upon the other employees as well."

With these sharp words of reproof ringing in his ears, Joe left the superintendent's office, passed out of the building and made his way thoughtfully toward the steamship docks. Half an hour later he returned to his room.

"Brick," he said jubilantly, "de *Aztec* sails at t'ree o'clock fer N' Yawk an' I t'ink ya kin git a job aboard uv her. I jist come frum dere now. Ya gotta hurry, dough. We ain't got much time an' ya gotta git dem w'iskers off."

The missionary was overjoyed at the news. A long sleep and plenty of nourishing food had reinvigorated his weakened body, he was warmly and respectably clad, and Joe's razor soon rid his face of the accumulated evidence of the road. With his rehabilitation thus complete, Brickman accompanied Joe to the dock, where they arrived at five minutes to three. The *Aztec's* crew were already preparing to cast off her lines.

"Visitors ashore!" roared the first mate through a megaphone.

"Joe," said the missionary disappointedly, "I fear we are too late."

"Dat's all right, Brick," responded his little partner reassuringly. "C'm on wit' me."

Straight up the passengers' gangplank he led the wondering Brickman; and then, while the ship's siren gruffly voiced her departure, he paused at the main deck and pressed a folded paper into his partner's hand.

"Give dat ta de poiser, Brick," he said with a grin. "He'll give ya a job cleanin' plates in de dinin' room till ya git back ta N' Yawk."

Joe turned and rushed down the gangplank, which was then pulled away from the ship's side by the waiting dock men. With a hundred handkerchiefs waving her bon voyage, the *Aztec* drew slowly out into Mobile Bay; and, leaning over her rail—

conspicuous among the passengers by his size and the hugeness of his feet—a man with shamelessly wet eyes gazed constantly shoreward striving to keep in view the insignificant outlines of a little runt of a man who stood on tip-toe among the crowd of spectators.

At last, when the outward bound ship had become a mere blur on the horizon, Brooklyn Joe left the pier and made his way reflectively back toward his place of employment. He had spent the last of his savings.

"Brick," he muttered, "I tol' ya I'd git ya back ta de boig. I'm clean, an' it's de blin' baggage fer me tanight—but now I ain't got y'ur number twelves ta look atter, so I kin *travel*."

Joe went at once into the superintendent's office.

"I'm quittin'. I want me time."

"Why, porter, I don't want you to feel that way about it," said the official soothingly. "I had to reprimand you, because we have certain rules and regulations that must be obeyed."

"I'm t'rough. I want me time."

The superintendent drummed thoughtfully upon his desk with his white and shapely fingers, looking meanwhile at his employee with troubled eyes.

"I'm sorry, Davis," he said after a pause. "Your work has been very satisfactory. Also you have refrained from smoking cigarets, and as far as I know you have not indulged in liquor since you have been in our employ. I had great hopes of you, Davis. I had thought that some day we could succeed in making a Christian out of you."

A look of quiet scorn crept into the old hobo's eyes and his lips curved into an ironic smile.

"I don't want no sassyty relijun," he retorted, "dat wants a guy ta t'row down his own pal."

"But you shouldn't 'pal' with such a bum, Davis," continued the official, fretfully handing over the small balance of wages due.

"Ya call dat guy a bum, hey? Why, ya w'ite collar stiff, dat bum's got more relijun in his big feet dan ya've got in y'ur whole —— guts!"

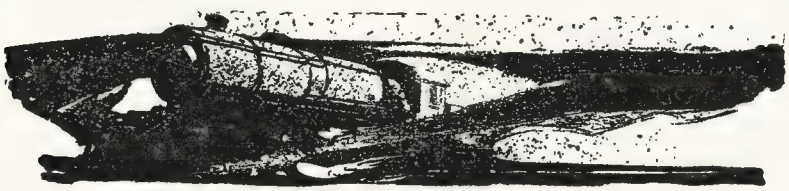
"Leave this place immediately!" shouted the superintendent, trembling with anger and mortification. "Or I'll have you arrested!"

"Aw, dat don't frighten me," replied the hobo shrilly. "Ya couldn't shove me in a woise jail dan dis!"

Back through the immaculate and oppressive sanctity of the big building Joe strode, directly to his little room in the basement. He yanked the white collar from his neck, tore it into shreds and threw them into a corner. Placing his neat derby hat on the floor, he kicked it revengefully against the wall. Then, having put on a dark shirt and a cap, he wrapped his few belongings into a bundle and made his way disgustedly into the street.

Bright lights from a corner building flashed a miraculous message of cheer to his rebellious spirit; and without a second's pause he hastened thither, banged familiarly upon the door with his fist and entered. An amazing gabble of male voices fell like music upon his ear and that red, good-natured face in front of him seemed somehow to belong to a long-lost friend.

"Gimme a scat, bartenner!" exclaimed Joe jovially, meanwhile glancing inquiringly about to decide which of the bystanders was most in need of a drink, "an' a pack uv dem butts."



THE CAMP-FIRE
A Free-to-All Meeting-Place For Readers Writers and Adventurers

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine Ernest Bertelson follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

Seattle, Washington.

To Camp-Fire Comrades: I just want to ease into the circle and once more get a sniff of the old birch smoke. As it is the first night I won't talk too much.

WAS born and raised like all the rest of the lads in a small town in Minnesota. The days spent with my boyhood pals about the lakes and woods of that region will be to me the happiest of my life. Later I went to school and studied engineering, bookkeeping, journalism, a little of everything.

Like the majority of you I have had my share of the hard knocks and rough going; always my own fault. I have yet the best home in the world. But you know how it is; a fellow gets that old longing to hit the pike, to try something different, to smell the fresh Spring in a new country. And isn't it queer? while a fellow is under one of these spells he doesn't mind the jolts. I have passed a few meals by punching new holes in my belt and surveyed a little scenery without looking through grimy coach windows. I've frosted my nose on trails up in the Arctic and sat seasick in the shaft-alley of an old tub during a tropical storm and wished the slimy bilge-water would rise up and drown me. But somehow things have always come out all right in the end. And wherever I've gone and in whatever class I've mixed, I have found the majority to be good fellows. A ragged coat does not always signify a bum, nor does a dress-suit invariably clothe a snob.

If through my writing I can waft a little fresh air from open places in to our pals who can't get out and enjoy it as we have done, I will be satisfied.—ERNEST BERTELSON.

ANOTHER comrade speaks up on the Sand Creek massacre, painting it in colors to make every American blush:

Long Beach, California.

"Uncle Frank" Huston is right, and I should like to add a little to back up his contention.

ALTHOUGH exhaustive Government documents completely cover a most thorough investigation of the incident, there is no part of Indian history so subject to misconstruction and creative of partisan feeling and prejudice, "even unto this day and generation," as the famous (infamous) Sand Creek massacre.

My father was the Maj. E. W. Wynkoop mentioned by "Uncle Frank," and among his friends and many others it was always believed that the purpose of transferring him from command at Ft. Lyon, Colorado Territory, to that at Ft. Riley, Kansas, was but part of the plot to give Chivington and his hundred-day men a clear and dangerless "field" to horribly slaughter decrepit men, women and children in the absence of their natural protectors, the chiefs and warriors of the tribe, who had been enticed away from their camp under some specious pretext.

FROM among Maj. Wynkoop's papers relative to the Sand Creek massacre the following abbreviated excerpts are taken: "In Sept. 1864, I returned to Ft. Lyon from an Indian expedition with three white captives procured from the Cheyennes and seven of the principal chiefs, who had delivered themselves up as hostages for the good behavior of their tribes, being desirous of terminating a war which had been most unjustly forced upon them by the whites. I proceeded to Denver with the rescued and hostages. There I found that a regiment of militia or men enlisted for a period of one hundred days had been raised by Gov. Evans. Feeling ran high and there were two parties, one opposed to making peace with the Indians, which was alleged to have been raised to fight Indians. To this party belonged Gov. Evans and Col. John M. Chivington, military commander of the district. Evans had represented to Washington that the regiment was necessary. I had proved to the contrary. With no excuse for its existence, the Government purposed mustering out this regiment. The plotted Sand Creek massacre would furnish an excuse for its continuance, and profit from the sale of supplies accrue to its instigators. While in Denver threats of personal violence against myself were made and it was determined to kill the chiefs under my protection, but I had a guard of eighty veterans of my own regiment, a part of those who had accompanied me on the expedition, men who had seen hard service with me for nearly four years and felt equally with myself the sacredness of the pledge I had given to the Indians; and although a regiment of would-be Indian killers lay in the immediate vicinity, backed by a ring of frothy contractors, suffice it to say the chiefs were not molested.

"COUNCIL was held with Gov. Evans, Col. Chivington and other officials. I quote from Gov. Evans report: 'They (the chiefs) were earnest in their desire for peace, and offered to secure the consent of their bands to lay down their arms. I

advised them to make immediate application for and to accept the terms of peace they might be able to obtain and left them in the hands of Maj. Wynkoop who took them back to Ft. Lyon.'

"Upon return to Ft. Lyon I instructed Black Kettle, head chief, and the other chiefs to bring their villages to the vicinity of the post, which they did, together with their women and children. They understood they were prisoners of war. Thus matters stood for some time, when I was ordered to report for command at Ft. Riley and Maj. Scott J. Anthony was ordered to the command at Ft. Lyon. Maj. Anthony assured the chiefs, in my presence, of perfect safety until such time as positive orders should be received from headquarters as to their disposition.

"I LEFT Ft. Lyon for Ft. Riley Nov. 25, 1864, and on the 27th Col. Chivington with the regiment of one-hundred-day men and a battalion of the 1st Colorado Cavalry arrived at Ft. Lyon, ordered a portion of the garrison under Maj. Anthony to join him, and against the remonstrances of the officers of the post, on Nov. 29, 1864, attacked the camp of friendly Indians, the major portion of which was composed of women and children, and all, to all intents and purposes, considered as prisoners of war. After being ordered back to Ft. Lyon I found all fearful atrocities had been committed by Chivington's command.

"Capt. Silas S. Soule, belonging to my command at Ft. Lyon, when ordered by Col. Chivington to accompany him with his troops, obeyed, but when the attack was made upon the Indian village, refused positively to go into action, and when Chivington threatened to place him in irons, he openly and to his teeth defied him; and when Soule's men were ordered to fire they refused, but sat like statues upon their horses without taking any part in the engagement, although directly under fire of the Indians who were doing their best to defend themselves. Col. Chivington never dared place Capt. Soule under arrest, but some months later he was murdered in the streets of Denver by a hired assassin, whom I had the pleasure of some time afterward arresting and sending in irons to Denver in charge of Lieut. James Cannon. The night the prisoner was incarcerated in Denver, through certain machinations, he was aided to escape, and Lt. Cannon was found dead in his bed the next morning, having been poisoned."

INCLUDED is an affidavit sworn to by several officers stationed at Ft. Lyon, condemning the action of Chivington and his command against Indians recognized to be friendly and considered as prisoners of war, subjects of protection instead of annihilation, showing that Chivington was aware of the circumstances, "that different officers remonstrated with and stated to him how these Indians were looked upon by the entire garrison," yet "in face of all these facts, he committed the massacre aforementioned." And then is cited a long list of horrible atrocities and outrages without a parallel in civilized or savage history; all of which, as "Uncle Frank" says, is of record at Washington, and which certainly supersedes for veracity and accuracy the mere statement made by individuals. Like Uncle Frank I just naturally could not keep silent either, and if it were not for limits of space, could add much more in support of the case. I will, however, add one more quotation from Maj. Wynkoop's papers which may be of interest.

"About a year after the Cheyenne massacre the following was told me by old Kit Carson, who, though the king of Indian fighters, always spoke in terms of horror of the Sand Creek slaughter. Carson said that he was sitting in the plaza at Taos, New Mexico, one day when a man rushed forth in the agony of delirium tremens. He imagined he was pursued by scalpless Indian children. Kit Carson said he frothed at the mouth like a mad dog, and his sufferings must have been terrible. Upon inquiry Kit learned that he had been one of the baby-killers at Sand Creek."

BREVETTED Lieutenant Colonel, Wynkoop, then chief of cavalry for the upper Arkansas military district, resigned from the Army July 11, 1866, went to a conference with Lincoln's successor, Pres. Andrew Johnson, who, at the urgence of Sen. Doolittle and others, appointed him as agent for the Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes, who had requested that he be their agent, with headquarters at Ft. Larned, Kansas, and after a brilliant career in this capacity resigned to enter the iron making business in Pennsylvania.

Col. Chivington, former preacher of the Gospel, and a man of scholarly attainments and much brillance of mind, who could have filled with credit any office within the gift of the people of Colorado, forced to resign from the army, finally did hold an office, which in the irony of fate seemed appropriately fit—that of coroner for the county of Arapahoe.—FRANK M. WYNKOOP.

AND a later letter from Mr. Wynkoop:

Long Beach, California.

Have just run across a bit which I believe is too good to omit if my recent communication on the Sand Creek massacre is published. It is distinctly characteristic of Kit Carson, from what I absorbed about him while residing among his former friends in New Mexico and from what my father has told me.

SAID Kit Carson at Ft. Garland, where he was colonel in command, in September, 1866, to General James F. Rushing: "To think of that dog Chivington, and his hounds, up thar at Sand Creek! Whoever heerd of sich doings among Christians? The pore Injuns had our flag flyin' over 'em, that same old Stars and Stripes that we all love and honor and they'd bin told down to Denver that so long as they kept that flyin' they'd be safe. Well, then, here come along that durned Chivington and his cusses. They'd bin out several days huntin' hostile Injuns, and couldn't find none no whar, and if they had, they'd run from 'em, you bet! So they just pitched into these friendlies, and massa-creed them—yes, sir, literally massa-creed them—in cold blood, in spite of our flag, thar women and little children even! Why, Senator Foster told me with his own lips (and him and his committee investigated this, you know) that that thar —— miscreant and his men shot down squaws, and blew the brains out of little innocent children even pistoled little babies in the arms of their dead mothers, and worse than this! And ye call *these* civilized men—Christians; and the Injuns savages, do ye? I tell ye what,

I don't like a hostile redskin any better than you do. And when they are hostile, I've fit 'em—'bout as hard as any man. But I never yet drew a bead on a squaw or papoose, and I loathe and hate the man who would. Of course, when we white men do sich awful things, why, the pore ignorant critters don't know no better than to follow suit. Pore things! I've seen as much of 'em as any white man livin' and I can't help but pity 'em. They'll all soon be gone, anyhow."—FRANK M. WYNKOOP.

HERE are the results of the readers' vote on the ten most popular stories in *Adventure* during 1921. As in previous years, we give also the ten ranking next in the vote. (S) stands for serial, (N) for complete novel, (n) for complete novelette, (Ss) for a series, those unmarked being short stories.

Of course a vote of this kind is only a partial expression, being cast by only a minority of the total number of readers, but nevertheless it is both interesting and decidedly useful in helping us in the office fill the magazine with the kinds of story our readers like best.

1921 VOTE

S—Serial. N—Complete Novel. n—Novelette. s—Short Stories. Ss—Series.

1	SORCERY AND EVERHARD	S	5859	*Gordon Young*
2	BAREHANDED CASTAWAYS	N	5797	*J. Allan Dunn*
3	THE PATHLESS TRAIL	S	5417	*Arthur O. Friel*
4	THE *Jararaca*	n	4723	*Arthur O. Friel*
5	WOLF LAW	N	4411	*Hugh Pendexter*
6	HEART OF THE RANGE	S	4118	*William Patterson White*
7	SLED WHEELER AND THE NAMELESS ORDER	S	3785	*John I. Cochrane*
8	UNDER THE DOME OF THE ROCK	n	3685	*Talbot Mundy*
9	THE DOOM TRAIL	S	3507	*Arthur D. Howden Smith*
10	THE TEMPLE OF THE TEN	n	3381	*W. C. Robertson and H. Bedford-Jones*
11	THE FLOATING FRONTIER	N	3160	*Hugh Pendexter*
12	MURKWOOD SPEARS	N	3159	*Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur*
13	BLUFFED	N	2751	*Gordon Young*
14	DEAD OR ALIVE	n	2669	*Gordon Young*
15	CHILDREN OF THE ROAD	N	2324	*Patrick and Terence Casey*
16	THE PATH OF A KING	Ss	2247	*John Buchan*
17	IN KAFFIR KRAALS	Ss	2184	*Santie Sabalala*
18	GUNS OF THE GODS	S	2175	*Talbot Mundy*
19	THE CITY OF BAAL	n	2163	*Charles Beadle*
20	OTHER SIDE OF BEYOND	N	2123	*Stephen Chalmers*

Of course there are a good many factors that play a part in such a ranking of stories. A story read a month ago leaves on the mind a more vivid impression than does an equally good story read eleven months ago. A long story has the big advantage of size and weight over a short one. A story read next to an unusually good one is likely to suffer by comparison more than it deserves. But, all in all, such a vote as ours furnishes an invaluable guide in helping the editors make our magazine provide the kinds of story our readers want.

As last year, we give also a list of the shorter stories by themselves. Those marked with a star are of less than twelve thousand words; the others are of twelve thousand to twenty thousand.

STORIES UNDER 20,000 WORDS.

Stories under 12,000 words are marked with an asterisk.

1	OTHER MEN'S SHOES	2037	*W. C. Robertson and H. Bedford-Jones*
2	THE BOUTO	1386	*Arthur O. Friel*
3	THE EXTERMINATOR	1287	*J. Allan Dunn*
4	THE GHOST OF DAGO FIDDLER	1197	*Norman Springer*
5	GHOST PIPES*	1115	*Stephen Chalmers*
6	THE DEVIL'S DOORYARD	1112	*W. C. Tuttle*
7	FISHERMAN'S LUCK*	1049	*Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur*
8	SIR GALAHAD AND THE BADGER*	969	*Gordon Young*
9	THREE MEN SEEKING	860	*W. C. Robertson and H. Bedford-Jones*
10	THE VILLAGE OF THE GHOST	819	*Harold Lamb*
11	SOLOMON	781	*Homer Irving Mac-Eldowney*
12	THE MATE OF THE *Androsina**	777	*Frederick William Wallace*
13	LAW RUSTLERS	753	*W. C. Tuttle*
14	A FEW WILL REMEMBER*	725	*Edgar Young*
15	THE PICTURE*	714	*Frederick Moore*
16	BEFORE MIDNIGHT	672	*Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur*
17	THE TRUMPETER	669	*Arthur O. Friel*
18	HAUNTERS OF THE HEIGHTS*	652	*F. St. Mars*
19	THE *Barrigudo*	632	*Arthur O. Friel*
20	THE MARRIAGE MARCH*	611	*F. St. Mars*

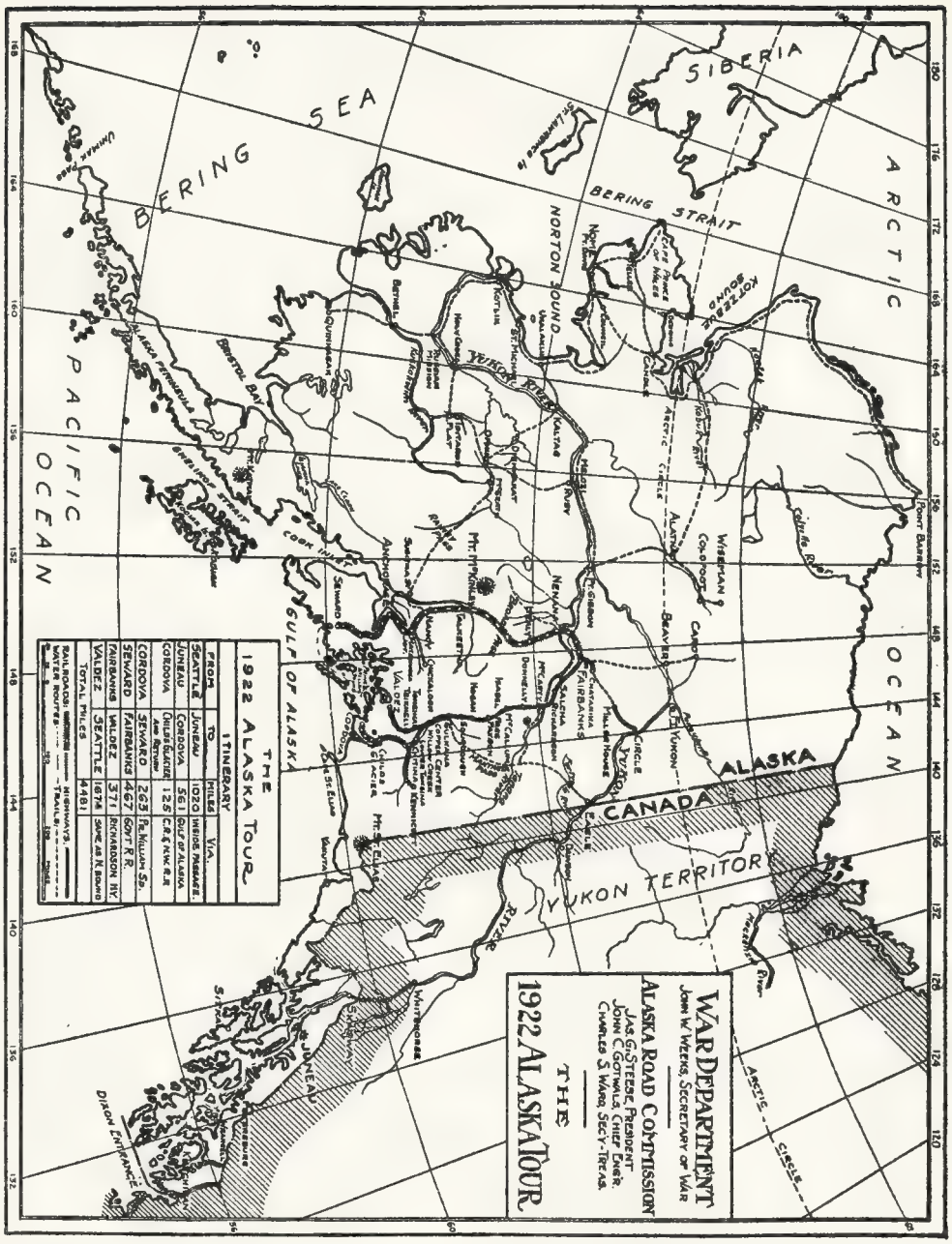
The annual vote by readers is both interesting and valuable. Be making your selections for the vote on our 1922 stories. It's your chance to help in editing our magazine and to make its stories a bit more to your own personal taste.

WANDERLUST has a way of staying in the blood. Some it keeps in the open places, some are kept in tight little offices. But it stays in the system.

Here is a letter from Jas. G. Steese, president of the Alaska Road Commission, with headquarters at Juneau, and with it a map showing Alaska's railroads, highways, trails and water routes. The "little red line" on the original is the loop of railroad from Seward to Fairbanks and of highway back down to Valdez, with a stray bit of railroad from Cordova to Childs Glacier.

Washington, D. C.

While temporarily in Washington engaged in my annual wrangle with the Committees of Congress over appropriations, I picked up a copy of your issue for December 30, 1921, and it prodded me in several



homesick spots. I have read *Adventure* intermittently since the first issue. My identification card is No. 1256.

I think I may claim to have read the magazine through more degrees of latitude than most of your readers. While I have not actually carried a copy over my heart from Pt. Barrow to Cape Horn, I have found copies in roadhouses and shelter cabins in the vicinity of both places. One finds the magazine in every roadhouse and prospector's cabin in Alaska.

But to return to December 30th. First, in "Ask Aventure," we have "tripping down the Amazon." I put in nearly five years on the Panama Canal in the heavy construction days, and have made the overland trip from Cuzco, Peru, to Buenos Aires, across the Bolivian desert. I had the following trip planned for 1917 when the War suddenly claimed my undivided attention. Mollendo, Peru, up the Southern Railway to Tirapata (south of Cuzco), then over the Inca Mining Company's trail to San Domingo (due east), then on into the

rubber country and down several tributaries of the Madre de Dios River, finally coming out on the Madeira-Mamore Railway and down to Para. This is a much more ambitious trip than the one recommended by Dr. Goldsmith, and is *not* recommended for greenhorns.

Next, we have the "Alaska Dog-Team Harness." There are now twenty-two (two teams) dogs of mine up on Broad Pass yapping their fool heads off because they know I have a ton and a half of dried salmon and tallow cached over on the north slope of Mt. McKinley, and if I do not get back soon, they may not have a chance to get at it. If Congress will just hurry up a bit with the money, I hope to open up a big project this Spring, partly as a development of Mt. McKinley National Park, but more especially to give the Kantishna miners an outlet by road to the new U. S. Government Railway. When I was in there last, they were sacking nothing that ran less than $170 per ton. Down at Juneau we can make a profit if it runs $2 to the ton.

While coming out from Nome this Fall on the next to last *Victoria*, I read in one of your last September, I believe, issues, Mr. Solomons' very comprehensive and accurate description of conditions in Alaska for the benefit of two boys down in Arizona who were having their first attack of wanderlust. I was glad to note that he emphasized the fact that nothing is obtained without hard work, even in Alaska, and not always then. One dredge last Summer took out $400,000 in gold, and one of my employes of a year ago refused to work for me this Summer as he wanted to work some good looking ground we had opened up in our road work. When I was in there this Fall (upper Innoko River), with his pardner in the hole, himself on the windlass, and his wife working the rocker, they had been getting out from $60 to $300 per day all Summer. But I know many prospectors in Alaska who have barely made wages for the past twenty-five years, and some of them have not been outside in all that time. Though Alaska has produced over $400,000,000 in minerals in the past 25 years, and produced about $16,000,000 in 1921, the average return to the small miner in 1920, according to the report of the U. S. Geological Survey, was only $398.

I had a very friendly feeling for those two Arizona boys. At about their age I struck out for myself, went broke in New Orleans (I was born in Pennsylvania), rode a freight across Texas, and found the land of romance and adventure to be Arizona and Sonora, not far from where they find it so dull. Truly, the far pastures seem greenest. I intended writing you then, but found so many things to require my attention when I got back to Juneau that I neglected it.

THIRD, "the San Blas Indians," in the Darien country. I was fortunate enough, some years before Rex Beach exploited these strangely isolated people with a moving picture machine, to meet several of the chiefs and to visit their villages, while on a coasting trip from Porto Bello. At that time the President of Panama established a custom house on one of the islands in the Gulf of Darien, and tried to win the allegiance of the Indians. When I was there they were still recalcitrant, had refused to see the President, and were flying the Colombian flag, not in deference to Colombia, but in defiance to Panama.

Lastly, the correspondence between your Prague correspondent and Edgar Young. I must really try to get to see the latter; he hit me in so many spots. But, if I go on much longer, I am likely to desert and head South.

I am enclosing a little map that may interest the office. This is of course a tour planned for parlor-car tourists. The readers of *Adventure* will consider the little red line only a starting point into the unknown.—JAS. G. STEESE.

THE following letter was not written for publication, but, though by omitting parts of it I do it an injustice, there are in it things that ought to be heard and that can not be said too often.

Ellenburgh Depot, New York.

Like you I am eligible for Sons of American Revolution and kindred bodies. There isn't any organization operating within my knowledge to-day which has an intention of quiet, sober political *labor*, without appeals to pure Americanism and other flag-waving sentiments, etc. *ad infinitum*. And I am *with you*. I want to work for better citizenship with pen and mouth, as well as with my individual ballot; and praise be I'm doing it, but in a darned small way and sphere; that is, among my personal friends. You can't build houses that will endure with poor bricks! Ever hear it before? Let's educate the children, but let's work with their parents, too! I'm not a young sprout now, with sufficient zeal to handle a Redhead Regiment, even though I did find heat to warm up the community two years ago by declaring that I would willingly smash the Republican Party one day if I could be sure of doing the same thing to the Democratic Party the following day; sort of ham and eggs story, you know. I must have been born a warm Republican, but my pet hobby to-day is that one can not be a good citizen and a good party man at the same time. I believe with our earliest authority in political matters that political parties are a danger to the country.

Let me use just a few moments more. I have pledged myself always to vote, never to vote without first having made an intelligent study of the question or candidates, always to vote according to the actual findings of my studies, never to vote by party or personal direction or sentiment. Not only to feel with a warm inward glow that such and such political ideals are mine, but also to assure myself that I have truly served my Country with each ballot cast. George Rogers Clark closed his career a scoundrel, I seem to remember, but at one time he said something about serving the people always being the only worthy course for real manhood. Many people like to say so to-day; it is easy to have the best of intentions; but I want to be sure that I do my duty, even if it doesn't leave me much time for telling about it or for appreciating that wonderful inner glow.—FRED C. ADAMS.

CONCERNING his new serial that begins in this issue here are a few words from Arthur O. Friel:

In this tale of "Tiger River" I am giving our old pals, *Lourenço* and *Pedro*, a well-earned rest. By the

time this appears they probably will have returned to headquarters from their long journey with *Tom Mack* through the Black Hawk country; and, after the strenuous life they've been leading for the past two or three years, I think all hands will agree that they're entitled to sit back with their cigarets and a corpulent jug of *cachassa* and let somebody else work. Moreover, though their *coronel* allows them plenty of rope, they could hardly go pirooting up into the Tigre section of Peru and Ecuador without losing their jobs—which would be asking altogether too much of a couple of good fellows.

SO, WHILE they loaf and strengthen their breath, let us journey up the River of Missing Men with another two-handed scrapper who first emerged from the jungle in "The Pathless Trail"—*José Martinez*, Peruvian outlaw, descendant of the Conquistadores.

Like all its predecessors, this story is mainly fiction. But, like them, it also contains certain grains of truth. For the edification of those members of our big crowd who like a little dash of fact to flavor the dish, here are one or two points which may be of passing interest:

Neither the *guayusa* tea, given the adventurers at first in order to lull their suspicions, nor the *floripondio* following it, is imaginary. Both are quite well known in the upper Amazon country, and the effect of each is as described.

THE eating of dirt—chiefly oily clays—by Amazon children is a habit noticeable not only in the Marañon region but along virtually the whole length of the great river. Monotony of diet and a perverted craving for fat probably causes it. And, though it's not mentioned in the story, I might add here that many grown-up Indians have a worse habit than that of the children—the simian trick of catching bugs in one another's hair and eating the captured quarry.

The Cordillera del Pastassa is a real *cordillera*, and the Tigre Yacu a real river. The massacre at Sta. Theresa, caused by the lying Moyobambino, Canuto Acosta, is history, as indicated in the story. And the tale of the squaw-man Valverde, his sudden rise to wealth, and the disappearance of expeditions bent on recovering the Inca treasure he left in the Inca lake of the Llanganati—including the one led by Padre Longo—are quite well known.—A. O. F.

QUITE a number of you have written in condemning the proposed national Sullivan law that would make it unlawful for an American citizen to carry a revolver for self-defense or any other purpose. The proposed law is merely silly and amusing—until you study its probable consequences in the light of the actual consequences of similar laws now in force locally.

For example, the police force of New York City is proving itself totally unable to cope with the epidemic of hold-ups and killings. Day or night, anywhere, anyhow. About the only thing the thugs haven't stolen so far is a New York policeman and you can't blame them for that. Do the thugs have guns? Oh, yes! Do the citizens who get robbed have guns? Oh, no! If they did and saved their property and lives by using or even showing them they would be sent to jail or fined. It's naughty to have a revolver, and dangerous—to the criminals. It's easy to take an illegal revolver from a law-abiding citizen, for he can be found when wanted. But a criminal can't.

What's the use of arguing? Facts have proved that this kind of law leaves decent citizens helpless in the hands of criminals while it leaves the criminals armed to bully, rob and kill the decent citizens and to resist and kill the police if any chance on the scene before it's all over. The question is is it merely stupidity that passes or attempts to pass such laws or are they advanced by those who, directly or indirectly, have the interests of the thugs at heart and profit by helping them along in their work?

Write your Congressman. Congressmen generally respond to the expressed wishes of the voters of their districts—unless some stronger motive of self-interest happens to stand in the way.

In the following letter I've omitted a part dealing with the man who supported the law in question. He has no cause to object to the omission.

Washington, D. C.

Just noting Mr. Harriman's letter *re* the armed decent citizen *vs.* the thug and hold-up, I want to say that he has the right idea in all of it. That "hombre" knows, and he generally does.

I WANT to tell any of you that care to read this just how an anti-gun-toting law worked in a State that was, and still is, BAD and where I studied this anti law from every possible angle and conservatively for eleven years.

I went into West Virginia as an officer, regular deputy sheriff, with outside or "field" work for the high sheriff, of one county in particular, and during the course of time, in nearly every county in that State.

When I first went there, and on the day of my arrival, the sheriff had been murdered in cold blood by a gun-toting desperado. I went on the posse after the gang that same night, and held the court what tried and convicted them, beating them at one attempt that was made at a wholesale jail delivery.

This was a bad State, all mining and railroad, with negro magistrates, constables and deputy sheriffs galore. The nearest officer to me was a negro who had served time in "Old Va" for felony. His magistrate was a Jew. The coal operators always had their resident officers and, during strikes, had guards for their property. . . .

Therefore he supported the now famous "—— pistol toting law."

UNDER the provisions of this law, no one might "tote" a pistol, or other dangerous and deadly weapon, unless a license had been issued in due and regular form. Under a maximum penalty of $200 and one year or not less than $50 and six months. First you had to advertise in some one of the county papers your intention to apply for a license to carry such weapon, giving your age, nationality and general description, together with a full statement as to your duties, and cause of your wish to be armed. This ad. had to stand for thirty days. Then you went before the judge of the criminal court, and after examination, if he chose to grant you a license, he did, or not as the case might be, but any one could contest your application, and a day was set, and still is on which all these applications were "heard."

If you were granted a license, you had to give $15,000 in a guarantee company (no personal bond accepted), pay for that, then pay $10 for the license, besides the fee to the clerk of court, and the printer's bill.

If you were (these laws remain the same to this hour), "a regularly elected sheriff or constable" you only had to give a bond of not more than $3500, personal if so wished. This included all officers in the State, policemen in the cities or towns, and all. *They* all just had to produce the $15,000 bond.

I have known every policeman in a town, and in several towns at the same time, unarmed, and for months at a time by this law, because they could not give this bond, and even if they could have got by on the bonding company's requirements, they could not afford to pay the $5 a thousand it cost, out of the salaries they received. Remember this was in the day when there was a regular barroom in every place one could possibly be stuck, and there are a dozen blind tigers and bootleg joints to one barroom now too.

THE very first year of this "pistol-toting law" murder and other kinds of crime increased over fifty per cent. It's still on the increase. I watched it closely, and I made more arrests than any man ever did in the same time in that State. Always the same old cheap "owlhead gun" on nearly every buzzard you got, and each and every "killin'" done with that type of gun too. Get after them and they could afford to throw that old cheap gun away, and frame up evidence to prove they never had it.

I speak whereof I know, for of my old gang of 21 men who went into that State and made things so a man could get on a train and ride out his ticket without being killed or at least scared to death, only two of us are alive. The others went out at the hands of the armed criminal, and are dead yet, though they took in actual aggregate of just twenty-five with them when they "went."

I was always armed, with a good one (or two) and I could use them, but made no display of them, as no he-man wants to, any more than he wants to display a nice suit of underwear he happens to have. The knowledge that I had them, and *could* shoot, as straight, and quick as a mad rattler, kept my breath in my body for 14 years among as bad men—and others too—as ever lived anywhere.

I had very little shooting to do, almost none, and handled thousands of bad cases in my time. (Can yet too.)

I HAVE always carried a weapon, not because I was afraid, but I never intended for any thug to take anything away from me without a fight.

I have been held up three times.

On each occasion I got the "hold-upper" and one of these times six of them, five of which got away from me, but I landed the big boss in the nearest police station. Just happened to have a nice hammerless .38 up my right coat-sleeve, which is a habit I have cultivated for a good many years, and when told "hands up" they went up and the .38 went off. It's easy to do if you practise.

This hold-up was in another anti-pistol-toting State, and I had to stand trial there after sending the hold-up to the pen for 10 years and fighting a conviction in court, for taking care of some one else's money which I was carrying at the time, and possibly my own life. Cost me at the lowest I could get it $106.

They brought the hold-up out of the pen to testify against me for being armed. (Particulars to any one who doubts me in this.)

IT'S just this. No gentleman, or MAN is going to make a jassax of himself with a gun. If any one does, that old rule of "survival of the fittest" which applies to bullies and their ilk, will automatically take care of him, or them.

Now just a little more.

In the 3 years of my residence, here in this, the "City Beautiful" of our country (or should be) I have known of hold-ups being pulled off all over it and around it. Everything has been used from an aeroplane down, and absolutely no men's life or property of any sort is safe here, unless he is mighty careful as to where he steps and what he does. No man may carry a gun, and the difficulties and red tape one has to go through to get a "pummit" would tire and disgust a burro and wear out his patience. But the criminal always has one or more, and they certainly do use them on the slightest excuse, as see the records of the murders, hold-ups, bank robberies rapes, etc., etc., etc., for the past year, and years.

Also, like Harriman, the day any person comes into a house of mine, no matter where I live, to search for, or confiscate one of my old well kept "sixes" or any of the others, he will have a fight.

I am law abiding too, and not at all fussy but——.

E. C. PAYNE.

LAST chance to bid for original *Adventure* covers, which will be sent express collect to highest bidders on July 1st. No bid of less than ten dollars per painting will be considered. Practically all the paintings are on canvas and without lettering.—A. S. H.

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader

In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free identification card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchange; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star,* Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Africa Part 1 Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, Northern Nigeria
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

(★ Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)

14. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

15. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

16. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

17. Africa Part 5 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

18. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

19. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

20. Turkey and Asia Minor
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

21. Balkans, except Albania
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

22. Albania
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

23. Scandinavia
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

24. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
FRED F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

25. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

26. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

27. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, 90 So. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

28. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

29. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

30. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

31. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deserento, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

32. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

33. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

34. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
ED. L. CARSON, Mount Vernon, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

35. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

36. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

37. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

38. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

39. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Parts of Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Except portions mentioned below. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

40. Western U. S. Part 2 Parts of Utah and Ariz.
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Cliff Dwellings, Two Grey Peaks, the Carrizo Mts., Cañon De Chelley, Chin Lee Wash, the Moonlight Country, the Blue Mts. (Utah), Navaho Indian Reservation in general. Pack trips, prospecting, hunting, camping, trapping and mining; habits, etc., of Navaho Indians.

41. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 1727 Lafayette St., Denver, Colo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

42. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

43. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

44. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

45. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

46. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

47. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

48. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

49. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating,

river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

50. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers

HOWARD A. SHANNON, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland.

51. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.

HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

52. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Maine

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

Praise

AS YOU may know, we're pretty backward about coming forward in praise of ourselves, or of the magazine. But we're not so reticent about printing a few good words occasionally—very occasionally—regarding "Ask Adventure," for the reason that the department is the work, not of us fellows in the office here, but of Adventurers from all over the world who freely give of their personal knowledge and experience for the benefit of others. The subjoined letter is just an indication of the esteem in which you're held, you "A. A." men, by your comrades of this department and of Camp-Fire:

Bellevue, Wash.

All the people with whom I have spoken about *Adventure* seem to agree that you serve the best wine last—namely, your Camp-Fire and "A. A." departments. Your "A. A." brigade certainly are giving of their best. They seem to have a personal solicitude and responsibility for their questioners even though expressed at times in brusk and blunt dissuasion. About two years ago I asked for some information from Mr. Harriman, and the reply, including a map (gratis) was certainly appreciated, of which this is a belated acknowledgment."
—L. BIEGER.

The full statement of the "Ask Adventure," as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Advice to Canoeists.

MR. PUNCH'S famous admonition "to those about to get married" applies with equal force "to those about to run the white water when they don't know how." The advice is: DON'T:

Question:—"A pal and myself plan a trip into northern Quebec, starting north from Lake St. John and following the Peribonka River. Could we cover the entire distance of this river by canoe? We plan to make camp about 280 miles north of St. John, near the head of this river; or would the trip be better made with packhorses to carry our grub and outfit, as we may remain to do some trapping?

What animals would inhabit this section? How low does the temperature fall? How deep is the snowfall?

Must we get a non-resident license to trap in this section; and if so, will a single license cover both pals if covering same territory? If so, what would be the cost of such a license? What would be the most advisable town to buy this equipment in order to cut down the amount of excess lugging of goods?"—JULIUS KREUZER, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Sangster:—Frankly, unless you are thoroughly versed in Northern water travel and know how to take care of yourselves in this region where you are absolutely dependent on your own knowledge and resources, I advise "DON'T."

No horses are feasible. The canoe is the only means of travel, and there is considerable "white" water, which means that you need be two mighty capable rapid-runners or else that you employ at least one trained river-running Indian to cruise the Peribonka north from Lake St. John.

The usual Northern species of fur—mink, otter, fisher, marten, some beaver, etc.; but you will note I bar advising in any manner, shape or form inquiries on "trapping for profit." You'd have to have two N. R. (non-resident) trapping licenses—full details as to this from the Department of Colonization, Mines and Fisheries, Quebec, P. Q., Canada.

You could buy most of outfit in Roberval, I think. Wouldn't advise starting such a trip with less capital than $800 anyway, and I would strongly advise against it for two men not having at least one Winter's experience in the North and also having experience in navigating these wild, swift Northern rivers. Too many have tried it and drowned.

A two-cent stamp won't carry everywhere. Read Rule I and note sections marked ★ or ✠.

The Cook Islands

IF A good climate, good crops and good neighbors are any inducement, here's something:

Question:—"I am eighteen years old. I have a high-school education. I am strong, weigh 140 pounds, and I am five feet ten inches tall.

I like outdoor life. I do not care anything about society and culture. I like the free life where a man can almost do as he pleases.

I want to settle down on a small farm that is large enough to yield a comfortable living. I want to settle somewhere in the Cook Islands.

About what are the living expenses of a single man? How much would the lease on about eighty acres cost me? Would I have to pay the French Government anything, and if so, about how much?

To what race do the natives belong? Are they savage and warlike, or are they partially civilized? About what would it cost me to start a small farm?

What are the chief products? Is the climate healthful?"—CLYDE COTTON, Leslie, Ark.

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—The Cook Islands are not administered by France, but are governed under mandate by New Zealand. The islands formerly belonged to Germany.

Though it is impossible for a white man to purchase land from a Cook Island native, he can lease it under certain conditions. I would advise you to write to Mr. F. W. Platts, LL. B., Resident Commissioner, Raratonga, Cook Islands, for data pertaining to leasing of lands from natives. It will be to your advantage in this case to get in touch with one of the Government officials, who should be able to assist you in more ways than one.

The Cook Islanders are a branch of the great Polynesian family. They are friendly, far from being savages, and are splendid companions.

Coconuts, oranges, lemons, bananas and tomatoes are exported. The climate is the healthiest in the world.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

How to Tell Good Citrus Land

ALSO a few words on Florida's "frost line:"

Question:—"Desiring to locate in Florida, would ask if you will not kindly answer the following questions:

1. Where about does the frost belt begin and end?
2. Does the vicinity of Eustis, De Land, Citra and Ocala appeal to you as a desirable locality for citrus growing?
3. Same question as 2, as to Arcadia."—WM. DE HART, Dawson, N. Mex.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—1. The "frost line?" This is a rather "unknown animal." There is a place south of here that is called Frostproof, but I don't think it is. But frost doesn't amount to much unless you are in young and tender vegetables. The citrus belt is subject to frosts. We had a fine white one yesterday morning,* but it didn't seem to hurt. Usually we have three or four here in Orlando each Winter.

It's the *freeze* that gets citrus fruits. The last big one was in 1895. It was a calamity. More than one grove-owner suicided.

2. Eustis is in a fine citrus section. I am not very greatly impressed with the De Land section as citrus land, though De Land is a fine little town. Don't know where Citra is, but if it's land-company stuff keep your eyes open. Ocala is a little too far north for citrus fruits. You will find the best citrus lands in Orange, Lake and Polk Counties.

3. Citrus fruits are grown in the Arcadia section; but Lake, Polk, and Orange Counties are, in my opinion, much better places for a grove. These counties are in the freshwater-lake region, and lakes help take the chill out of the air when there's danger of a freeze.

There are your questions answered. Now let me add this:

Don't buy land you haven't seen and investigated fully. Not all the land in a good orange section will grow citrus fruits. Usually any rolling land that has big pine-trees on it is good citrus land, but not always. Land with a hardpan too close to the top is bad. Perfectly flat land is bad, because cold *drains* off just as water would. White land is always lean. Blackjack oak is usually a sign of lean land. Certain land takes trees budded on sour roots best, and certain other land is best suited to trees budded on lemon roots. Get acquainted with all this before you go into the citrus-fruit business.

Sometimes it pays to buy a three- or four-year-old grove already put out. Sometimes one can buy an old grove and by work and fertilizer and budding reclaim it. Sometimes a good bearing grove can be picked up at a bargain, but look out for such things as foot-rot; many a foot-rotted grove has borne its banner crop the year before it died.

*Mr. Liebe wrote this on Jan. 31, 1922.

Canoe Trip, Prince Albert to The Pas

BE CAREFUL to dodge the fly season:

Question:—"Please furnish me data on a canoe trip two of us contemplate down a Canadian river.

Are both the north and south branches of the Saskatchewan River navigable for canoe travel without excess portages?

For a trip of about one month (actual time on the river) from what point could the start best be made, basing this schedule on a reasonable rate of travel for tenderfeet, ending within reach of railroad transportation home?

What town offers the best outfitting facilities as regards guides, canoes, supplies and camping equipments? Could such equipment be rented or must it be purchased? If the latter, could it be readily sold at such a town as The Pas?

Would not The Pas be a good place to end the trip?

What time of the year would such an outing be most enjoyable; day and night temperatures at this season?

What arms would we find useful?

Approximate charges for guides; would their assistance be really necessary?

If a similar trip was attempted down the Peace River from say Peace River Crossing, what kind of transportation is available from Lake Athabaska back to a railroad? If this Peace River trip, in your estimation, is preferable to the one down the Saskatchewan, please give me the data thereon instead of the latter.

I request that my initials only be used if my inquiry is published."—R. F. O.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—I think probably the best route you could take on your proposed canoe trip would be from Prince Albert, Sas., to The Pas or Grand Rapids on Lake Winnipeg.

The best time to make a trip of this sort would be to leave Prince Albert about the end of May or the middle of August as from May to the end of June there are few flies but from June until the middle of August they are bad.

You could secure canoe and outfit in Prince Albert and would find high water in May and no portages all the way to The Pas. You would be traveling down-stream and would find it very easy work. If you so desired you could branch off at Sturgeon Lake and spend a week or two visiting the mineral belt in that area.

There should be no difficulty in securing a guide in Prince Albert, and I think you would be well advised to look up the provincial police there, who could give you any additional information you desired and put you in touch with a guide. Constable Phil Powers leaves Prince Albert with a motor-boat and travels to The Pas several times during the Summer months, and if he is in Prince Albert when you arrive he could give you much useful information.

You could take train from The Pas back home, or you could continue down the Saskatchewan to Grand Rapids on Lake Winnipeg, a fine trip, and pick up a boat there for Winnipeg, as a pleasure steamer makes a regular weekly trip to that point.

The whole trip from Prince Albert to Grand Rapids could be done easily in a month, giving you plenty of time *en route* and opportunity to see the country. There might also be a chance of a little hunting.

Any one can usually anticipate good weather during the periods I have mentioned, and the temperature should be somewhere between sixty and eighty. The nights are not cold at that time of year, and a couple of good blankets should suffice for covering together with a small tent.

A twelve-gage shotgun and .250-3000 Winchester rifle are good weapons to have along, and you are then prepared for any type of game.

The Peace River district is out of my territory, but I do not think you would find the trip to Peace River Crossing any better than the one I have outlined.

I shall be pleased if you will look me up if you stop off at The Pas.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Home Life of the Japanese

WHAT they eat—what they wear—their housing:

Question:—"I have noticed that you are in charge of the Japanese section of "Ask Adventure" department and would like to get a little information on Japan.

First of all, I would like to know what foods the people eat and drink, what their meals are called in their language, what tools they use in eating and anything else connected with their diet.

I would also appreciate advice as to the general plan and structure of their houses. Are the paper houses with sliding screens for doors still in existence, or are they simply relics of a past age? If you could give me the names of some of the principal parts of a Japanese house (as they name them) I would appreciate that also.

Thirdly, what dress do the men and women affect, and what are the names of the various pieces? Anything additional in the matter of dress or costumes will be very helpful.

What are the best books you know of (either fiction or non-fiction) which would give me a detailed account of Japanese life and manners?

I trust I have not exceeded my privilege in questioning you and will very much appreciate a reply at your early convenience."—EDWARD F. MEDOSCH, Cincinnati, O.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—I can in a letter give you only an inadequate outline in response to your questions regarding certain Japanese customs; but—here goes:

Japanese food—*tabemono*, as distinguished from *yoshoku*, European food—is of great variety and is rather more pleasing to the eye of an American than it is to his taste. A traveler in that country always longs for a try at the exceedingly attractive boxed lunches offered for sale at all railway stations, but one try is usually enough.

As in all parts of the Far East, rice in the native diet of those who can afford it, takes the place of bread. In Japan there is a very large class of poor people, especially in the country districts, whose

main food is the coarser grains, such as barley and millet.

The Japanese are such temperate meat eaters that they may be said to live on a fish and vegetable diet. The reason for this is that Buddhism, in former years, forbade the taking of life for any purpose. This still has an effect upon the national life, though this old ban on meat was lost sight of years ago.

Beans, perhaps, stand next to rice in importance, especially the soy bean, from which is made the *shoyu*, or bean sauce—sort of a ketchup—which is in as general use as are tea and tobacco. *Shoyu* is used by rich and poor at every meal and upon everything as a relish. Egg plant, cabbage, radish, lotus-roots, taro, Irish potato, sweet potato, bamboo shoots and mushrooms are amongst the vegetables commonly used—cooked, raw, or pickled.

Everything that comes from the sea is utilized as food, including many varieties of sea-weed. Eel is a great favorite. Much fish is eaten raw; it is also cooked in a great many different ways, and is pickled. The people are great lovers of pickled relishes and use vinegar and salt freely, but not pepper.

Tea, without sugar or milk, is the universal beverage. *Sake* is the Japanese wine made from rice, but it is very light. Chopsticks are commonly used as food implements.

Increasing contact with Europeans has, of course, had an effect upon the national diet, as it has upon everything, but what has been "bred in the bone" for centuries is still the foundation of Japanese life. Fruits are now cultivated to a greater extent than formerly; jams are being manufactured; sweets take a larger part in the diet than formerly; coffee is offered at some native inns. Throughout the empire in the larger commercial cities, it is possible to get hotel accommodations in European-style hotels.

The Japanese who can afford to, eat three meals per day: *Asa-han*, *ban-meshi* and *yu-meshi*, corresponding to our breakfast, dinner and supper.

I might add that eggs are in quite common use and omelets are much liked.

The houses in Japan range from the grass-and-clay thatched hut of some remote country district to the modern concrete office structure of the largest cities. Generally speaking, however, the ordinary house is a light wooden structure of one plan; but the size and fineness of material used depend upon the wealth of the owner.

The roofs are heavy in proportion to the rest of the house, and are supported by "earthquake" posts of pine, fir, or in case of a very fine building, the cryptomaria lumber from the northern forests. The covering of the roof is straw thatch, shingles or tile.

The house has no cellar and no chimney, and is unpainted excepting certain ornamental parts. The outer walls are permanent on two sides.

Two stories are sometimes built, but the second rarely extends over the entire base story; usually a balcony or *engawa* surrounds all the inner rooms. These rooms are built to the size of their floor mats—8 feet by 3 feet—and measure to so-many mats in size. The working-rooms are at the front and the guest and living-rooms at the back, opening on to a garden.

The ordinary house is built to accommodate four or five persons. The chief room has two recesses, raised a few inches above the floor level, the *tokonoma*, where paintings and vases are displayed, and the *chigai-dana;* in the top of this are numerous drawers and shelves, while below is a cupboard for bedding. These rooms have generally two stationary walls, while the others are of sliding screens covered with paper, and the outer walls are made with the same sort of screens but usually of a tough and semi-transparent paper. The inner walls may be decorated or not.

The usual dress of the men is a loin-cloth—*shita-obi*—of bleached muslin, then a shirt—*juban*—of silk or cotton, and the kimono. In Winter several extras are added, and the wadded kimono is worn. The outer gown, or kimono, is of sober-colored wool or silk—style of material and minor points of cut in the kimono change from time to time.

The coolies wear tight-fitting drawers and cloth gaiters and a short coat instead of the kimono.

All classes wear cotton socks that come only to the ankle and have a separate place for the great toe; these are called *tabi*. Wooden clogs—*geta*—are worn for shoes, and the paper umbrella takes the place of a hat.

The "official" dress, however, is now European style, but the Japanese man, in the privacy of his own home and frequently in his own business office, prefers the old, comfortable kimono style of dress. Jewelry is rarely worn excepting at the fastening of the kimono at the neck.

The women's dress does not differ so very much from the men's. In the country districts the farmers' wives, who help at the gardening, wear trousers and coats like their husbands'. But in towns the women wear first two small aprons of bleached muslin around the loins, then the shirt, and then one or two or three kimonos—according to the season and occasion. The under kimonos are of delicate colorings, and the outside kimono is of a sober-colored wool or silk.

Over the kimono is bound the sash—*obi*—and upon this *obi* and the ornaments in her hair much money is sometimes lavished. The *obi* is to the Japanese woman what the hat is to an American woman. The Spring openings at the prominent silk shops display *obi* silks ranging in price from two or three dollars up to several thousand.

For books: "Development of Japan," by Latourette; MacMillan. "Japan, Real and Imaginary," by Greenbie; Harper's. "Japan Day by Day," by Morse; Houghton. "Samurai Trails," by Kirtland; Doran.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it

The Great-Circle Route

THE dictionary says that the great circle of the sphere is formed when its plane passes through the center of the sphere. Whatever that may mean—and I pass—the man who understands it can save 748 miles on a trip from Valpo to Sydney:

Question:—"Will you please answer this question? A ship has sailed due east. Say 3,000 miles. I understand she could return to the starting-point by the greater arch circle course, and reach starting-point, sailing less than 3,000 miles.

Can this be done regardless of ship's position? Can it be done 6,250 miles from magnetic north? Is your answer based on fact or theory?

I am seeking proof of the shape of the the earth by the simple rule of measurement.

Men go down in submarines and in case of accident die because they have no means by which they can abandon ship and reach the surface. I can build a life-boat for a submarine. The cradle of said boat can be attached to any deck, and the life-boat can be launched from this cradle, from any depth, more safely than can be done from a surface boat, and the water pressure that holds an outside cover or door fast shut under water is the one thing that makes this practical.

Can you suggest anything that might help me to get the attention of those who would be interested?" —O. H. FOLSOM, Easton, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. B. Brown:—A vessel sailing due east for 3,000 miles could return by the great-circle route at a very large saving in distance. For example, Sydney, Australia, and Valparaiso in South America are in substantially the same latitude. The difference in distance covered as between a vessel which sails due east and one which follows the great-circle route between the two places would be 748 miles. The vessel traveling the great-circle route, at the same time, would have to go 28 degrees south of the latitude in which both ports are situated, if she followed the true great-circle route. That the shortest distance between any two points on a sphere is an arc of the great circle which intersects the two points is not a theory, but a mathematical fact.

The only thing which would be likely to attract the attention of any one to your proposed submarine life-boat would be to build such a boat and demonstrate its workings successfully. It is a practical impossibility to interest any one of serious importance to you in any paper invention, not perfected and demonstrated practically. It is hard enough to get attention and backing even after an invention is completed and demonstrated. There are thousands of patents of large potential value which are lying dormant today for precisely that reason and for the further reason that to make a success of a patent a man must not only be an inventor but a crackajack salesman and business man; and the qualities are not often found united in the same person.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever, but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Patagonian "Giants"

LONG-BODIED, and looking long on horseback; that's all:

Question:—"I am intending to make a hunting and trapping trip to Patagonia, southern Argentine, to last about four years, starting around the first of next year.

1. What kind of natives and in what number will I find in the vicinity of Lake Argentine, and upper Rio Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County?

2. What other profitable fur-bearing animals, besides nutria and bear, will I encounter there?

3. Will a .30-30 Winchester be heavy enough for the hunting and .45-cal. Colt for side arm?

4. Will I get both kinds of ammunition in Santa Cruz, or better bring it with me from Buenos Aires?

5. Have I to apply for a hunting license in B. A. to hunt and trap in Patagonia?

6. How early does the Winter generally set in, in the upper part of Santa Cruz County?

7. Do you know of a place, where I can get a pretty good map of the section in question?"—ERNEST KRAISZL, New York.

Answer, by Dr. Goldsmith:—1. The Indians in the territory of Santa Cruz are Tehulches or Pampas, many of them being half-bred. The Tehulches were regarded in the past as giants. As a matter of fact, they were as a rule very large people, with particularly long bodies, which gave them the appearance of being larger than they really were, when on horseback. They are pretty friendly and good-natured, and are not difficult to deal with, if one shows ordinary gumption.

2. The principal fur-bearing animals to be found in this section are beavers, foxes (different species), chinchillas, etc.

3. I think the weapons mentioned would be quite satisfactory.

4. You would have no difficulty in securing ammunition for the firearms mentioned in most parts of Argentina, but it might be just as well for you to take a supply from Buenos Aires.

5. You can secure a license by application to the minister of agriculture in Buenos Aires.

6. Winter begins about the first of June.

7. Rand, McNally & Co., 42 East 22d Street, New York City, could probably sell you a map that would show Patagonia in considerable detail. In Bailey Willis' "Northern Patagonia," you will find many good maps of different parts of southern Argentina. In the back of W. A. Hirst's "Argentina," published by T. Fisher Unwin, London, and handled in New York by Charles Scribner's Sons, you will find a pretty good map of Argentina that shows the territory of Santa Cruz somewhat. It is also possible that you might obtain something from the Argentine Consul-General, Sr. Ernesto Pérez, 17 Battery Place, New York City.

Travelers Cheques

CALL this correspondence a free ad if you will; we don't care. (But we do care if you call it a paid ad, because this department can't be bought.) A. S. H. thought it was important enough to print; and so do Raymond Spears and I. Concerning Mr. Kiernan's letter, Raymond writes:

Here is a letter that suggests the interesting problem of carrying funds in civilized, half-civilized and barbaric regions—wampum, checks, gold, marks, rubles, francs, and all the rest. The amount of money I carried never was alarming. A paragraph on the problem might be useful, though; when my father went up through Central America, he ran into two or three wars. He sewed his American gold into shields which he wore under his shirt. He had a pocket full of native silver. He was held

up three times, and divided even with the revolutionists or Federals each time—counted coins half and half from coast to capital of Honduras. Carrying funds is some problem!

The letter Raymond is talking about is subjoined. Why the American Express gives the English spelling to checks is beyond me; also why it makes an adjective instead of a possessive out of "travelers." And if "cheques" is spelled the English way, why not be uniform and spell travelers with two "l" 's? The limey never lived that could or would spell it with only one. . . . But these be the meanderings, I doubt not, of a pettifogging, comma-chasing editorial so-to-speak mind:

American Express Co.,
65 Broadway, New York.

As an "Adventurer" and a constant reader for many years past of *Adventure* I am always interested in reading the advice given by the editorial staff and the writers affiliated with the magazine appearing in the "Ask Adventure" section.

I was particularly interested in reading your article on "Touring," and from my own experience can frankly and honestly state that it contains excellent data for the amateur wanderer, camper and tourist. My only regret is that your article did not appear years ago when making my first attempt at camping out under the blue skies. I would have avoided a good many trials and tribulations which I now recall every once in a while with smiles.

However, there is reference made in the next to last paragraph of your article regarding the advisability of having some means of identification on one's person when cashing checks. From my own experience, and I think you will find thousands of others will agree with me on this point, the best means for a camper, tourist, adventurer, sportsman, etc., to avoid annoyance in obtaining funds is for one to lay in a supply of Travelers Cheques. You sign the Travelers Cheques in the upper left-hand corner when you buy them, and to cash them you sign them again, this time in the lower left-hand corner. The two signatures identify you. This safe method of identification obtains the world over.

They are popular because countless thousands have found them to be practical and acceptable in the most out-of-the-way places and a positive protection to their money. Further, if the cheques should be lost the owner will be refunded the amount of these cheques upon filling out certain protective forms.

Travelers Cheques are not attractive loot; for thieves do not want them because they can be cashed only when countersigned by the original purchaser, and the penalty for forgery is a heavy one. Here in our own company we issue Travelers Cheques; in fact the American Express Company originated this method of insuring one's funds. American Express Travelers Cheques are called universal currency, and advisedly so; for they are known and accepted throughout the world by hotels, banks and merchants.

I am confident that you will never have cause to regret recommending the use of Travelers Cheques in place of personal checks for financing a trip, particularly when they are held in high esteem and always carried by prominent sportsmen throughout the world. Last year the institution which I am connected with sold nearly $100,000,000 worth of Travelers Cheques, which speaks for itself.—Jas. P. Kiernan, Office Manager.

Mr. Spears acknowledged Mr. Kiernan's letter as follows:

Thank you for the remarks on my "Touring" slip. I see now that the mention of funds does not adequately cover the matter. I was not thinking, at the moment, of the usual but of the emergency.

The slips could only cover a subject in a general, suggestive way, to help the individuals in their own planning. The big job is to help people think and know for themselves. My practise is always to send a personal letter with printed matter, bringing the focus on the problem from the particular questioner.

I am sending your letter on to F. K. N., of the magazine's resident staff, as I do all suggestions and criticisms. I suppose "Ask Adventure" serves merchants, manufacturers, and transportation companies to considerable sums, now that I think of it, not realizing the good it does in that way. I know I have recommended travelers cheques, from my own experience with them, which this phase brought up.

The Andamans

A FEW facts about an interesting penal settlement:

Question:—"Would you please give me some information about the habits of people living in the Andaman Islands and other islands in the Indian Ocean?

Do the Andaman Islands belong to the British Empire or to France?

Are the Andaman Islands group a general penitentiary or just a single island? Political or civil penitentiary?

If this is published in *Adventure* please use my initials only."—K. J. P., Pacific Grove, Calif.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—Since it would be impossible to give general information on all the islands in the Indian Ocean in a letter, I will answer only the specific questions concerning the Andamans, which are British. The capital of both Nicobars and Andamans is Port Blair, on South Andaman, and is the penal settlement of which you ask. It was established in the days of the East India Company for life convicts, civil, and at one time recently (I believe in 1910 or thereabouts) the prisoners numbered as high as ten thousand or more.

Very few, comparatively, of the natives of Andaman Islands are civilized; they are one of the dwarf races of negritos, and run about 4.5 feet in height generally. On the Nicobars the natives are more like the Malays, much bigger than the Andamans, and still savage toward whites.

In both groups it is only a small proportion of the islands that are settled and civilized, though the British in India are persevering, and there is a growing trade already in oil-seed, coffee, rice, tea, cocoa and timber.

A very good book for you to get is "In the Andamans and Nicobars," by C. Boden Kloss. Any reputable bookseller could get it for you. It's not so old that the conditions related are out of date, and it's full of interesting data. I haven't a copy, or I could tell you the publisher; but that doesn't matter. Ask your nearest big bookstore.

Interior of Eastern Nicaragua

BEAUTIFUL country; there's gold there too, which is also a sight for sore eyes:

Question:—"I am quite curious about the interior of eastern Nicaragua, between the range and the Caribbean coast. I would like very much to know what dangerous beasts, birds, reptiles and insects one could expect to come in contact with there, what insect-borne diseases he must look out for and what precautions or treatment he would have to equip himself with; also whether a tent or a board shack or something else would be best adapted to climatic and other conditions, if one were planning to live there a while. I guess it is a region that few people get into, and I do not know whether it differs materially from other sections of Central America. If you can give me any pointers I shall certainly be glad to have them. I enclose stamped envelop.

I don't know how I can requite the favor I am asking, but if I can I will."—A. T. RICHARDSON, Fullerton, La.

Answer, by Mr. Emerson:—Beginning at the Caribbean coast, eastern Nicaragua is low and tropical, covered with jungle and dotted with little spots of grassy land and swamps for the first forty miles, on an average. After this the ground begins to rise, but the heavy jungle continues up to an altitude of some three thousand feet, where it begins to show signs of temperate-zone forest.

From there on up it is temperate, and in the higher altitudes it can be real cool at certain seasons of the year. Many streams head up in this part and flow toward the Atlantic, forming several large rivers which would be navigable except for the fact that most of them have shallow bars at their mouths over which larger boats can not pass.

There is no more beautiful country in the world than the highlands on both the eastern side and western side of the tops of the main range of mountains. While I was with the Nicaraguan Government as auditor of their railroads and steamship lines I made a trip back from Managua several days by mule and found the climate and country ideal in every way, a regular "Mohammed's Paradise" of a place. However, I did not go into the least known of it, which is called by the natives Las Montanas Desconocidas, or Unknown Mountains, and is said to be inhabited by a wild canoe-running breed of Indians known as the Toacas.

At various places along the headwaters of several of the streams small mining-companies are operating, mainly being operated by Germans; but just what results they have had for the last eight years is a matter of conjecture. Indications show that much gold should be over in this part: but no real prospecting has ever been done in this part.

There are several working mines in the western part also, mining ore, near the railroad that runs up from Corinto to the Gran Lago. These are in the hands of English and Australian companies.

If I were making the trip you contemplate I would make it from the Pacific side by rail to Managua or Leon or some place on the railroad, and then outfit and make it across the mountains from that side. That would avoid the fevers of the lowlands of the Atlantic side.

The Encyclopedia Britannica will give a full account of the flora and fauna of Nicaragua under heading of the name "Nicaragua." I would not figure on a tent but would make a thatched shelter native style. It is good to take plenty of mosquito net against flies and mosquitoes in any part, although this high country is fairly free from them.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

DANEKER, JOHN LEE. Age fifty years, height five feet eleven inches, weight 150 pounds, red or auburn hair. Last seen on the *City of Buffalo* steamer running between Buffalo and Cleveland. May be in Canada. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HARRY L. DANEKER, 1224 Narragansett Blvd., Edgewood, R. I.

UPDEGRAFF, PVT. FRANK. Was with Co. C, 5th Inf. A. P. O. 927 A., Germany, March, 1921. Was overseas with Troop A 15th Cavalry, in which he was a Sergt. Returned to Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming, June, 1920, where he was discharged the following August. Later the same year reenlisted in the army of occupation. Height five feet ten inches, weight about 150 pounds. Straight black hair and large gray eyes. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address HATTIE WELLS, 194 Simcoe St., Toronto, Ont., Canada.

THOMPSON, CLARENCE LEE. Son of Joseph and Rhoda Thompson. Born in Brown County, Ohio. Age fifty-six. Has gray or light blue eyes, roman nose, five feet six inches in height, weighs 160 pounds. Last heard of in Lama, Washington. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address LOU THOMPSON CRAIK, 375 Winfield Ave., San Francisco, Calif.

DICKARD, VERNON. Served with Artillery outfit in the war. Five feet eight and one-half inches, dark hair, slender build. His home is in Texas. Any information will be appreciated.—Address B. C., care of *Adventure.*

HUMISTON. Would like information regarding any one named Humiston, Humeston or Humason, for use in a family history.—Address REV. WALLACE HUMISTON, Northfield, Conn.

SCHMIDT, A. Blue eyes, light hair, five feet seven inches, age twenty-four. Last heard from in Omaha, Nebraska. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. A. SCHMIDT, care of *Adventure*.

STEVENSON, PVT. FRED. Battery C, 148 F. A. Last heard of in France. Any information will be appreciated by an old friend.—Address HALLIE DODSON, 940 Corbett St., Portland, Oregon.

ALLEN, JOSEPH C. Was in the 94th Company, Coast Artillery Corps, and stationed in 1907 at Fort Winfield Scott, California. Last heard from in the Summer of 1920, while in Lumber Camp Number Six, near Portland, Oregon. Age forty years, brown hair and eyes, dark, coarse features, weight about 185 pounds, height five feet nine inches. Any information will be appreciated by his mother—Address MRS. M. J. ALLEN, 2816 English Ave., Indianapolis, Indiana.

NO. 9628. Please write to your friend.—Address SAMUEL SMITH, Route No. 2, Farmingdale, N. J.

MURPHY, THOMAS JOSEPH. Tailor by trade, also a bookkeeper. Left Oakland, California, 1899. Age sixty-seven years. Brown hair, and gray eyes. Any information will be appreciated by his daughter.—Address GERTRUDE, care of *Adventure*.

KIMMIS, BRUCE. Manufacturing chemist and druggist. Home supposed to be in Phœnix, Arizona. Last seen in Salt Lake City, Utah, Summer, 1915. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

HUNT, ROBERT. Born in California. Lived in Oakland in 1916. Last seen in Westwood, Calif., Lumber town, in 1916. Write to me.—Address G. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

KEENAN, WILLIAM. Born in Fort Worth, Texas. Last seen in El Paso, Texas, 1914. Write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

THORNTON, WALTER. Ex-Mess Attendant 3rd Class., U. S. N. A. Write to your friend.—Address WILLIAM NANCE, P. O. Box 33769, San Quentin, California.

BRANDON, W. E. We went to Campeche in sailing canoe to join refugee ship early 1914. Had nice trip down the coast. Write.—Address SMITH, Box 6, Mexia, Tex.

SHATTO, POWERS. Last heard of in Madison, Wisconsin. Any information will be appreciated.—Address H. W., care of *Adventure*.

PATTERSON, FRANK. Age twenty-six, height five feet five inches, fair complexion. Last seen in Cleveland, Ohio. Any information will be appreciated.—Address M. S., care of *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in either the June 30th or July 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

BARTON, JAS. E.; Bunch, William S., Cabaniss, Harvey; Carter, J. P.; Cline Charles; Day, George E.; Ehrlich, Oscar; Fleming, Cyrus; Flye, Vernon F.; Fraser, Alexander; Gardner, H. Belden; Hammers, Dr. Frank; Harper, Chas. E.; Harty, William; Hood, Herbert James; Hough, T. J. (Tom); Jacks, Milton; Jakubovsky, Joseph and Vidikovsky Kasimir; John; Kelly, Francis A.; Kenny, D. W.; Livingston, Sam L.; Lockwood, Robt. L.; McKeefery, Frank J.; Miller, Julius; O'Neill, Jack; Parker, Willie Larater; Patterson, Tom; Perry, Ernest Leslie; Pharis, Alfred; Prusak, Johnnie; Ridenour, O.; Ritey, Richard P.; Rolingthis, Anthony P.; Spence, Edmond Shackleford; Stapler, Capt. John R.; Storks, Frances Havens; Traynor, W. J. H.; Tisdale, Clark.

MISCELLANEOUS—Descendants of Desire Bourgeois, born in the Village Les Petites Chiettes now village De Bon Lieu, Franche Comte, Jura, France, who emigrated to California U. S. A. in 1848; Would like to hear from Col. Muerling of the 2nd C. M. M. G. Bdg. regarding some photos taken in France. Also would like to hear from "Hump" Parks, Auty, Sergt. Mulligan and other D. R's.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JULY 30TH ISSUE

Besides the complete novel mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

PADDY BURNBROOK'S WIG — ***W. Townend***
Hair upon the waters.

THE OTHER ALLINGHAM — ***Robert Simpson***
The man who "went black," in the West-African bush.

THE DUCKLEGGER — ***Hermann B. Deutsch***
Louisiana—'Cajan wiles.

TASCOSA — ***Frederick R. Bechdolt***
A Border town that died with its boots on.

UMLIMO, LOBENGUELLA'S WITCH-DOCTOR — ***Santie Sabalala***
For the Promised Land of the Matabele.

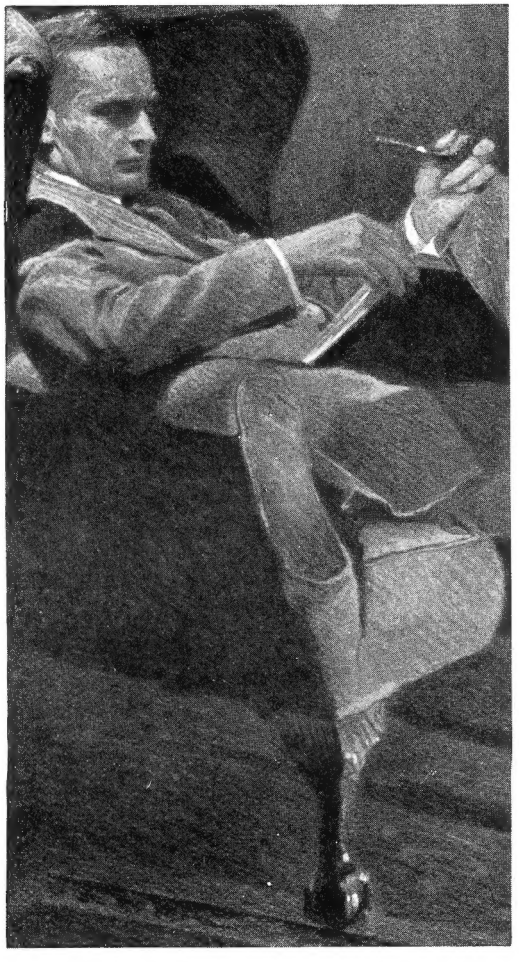
TIGER RIVER A Four-Part Story Part II — ***Arthur O. Friel***
In the hands of the white Indians.

WHEN BOSUN MEETS BOSUN — ***R. de S. Horn***
The yell was a jinx and something more.

NEMESIS PLAYS A HAND — ***T. Von Ziekursch***
A "husky-dog" intervenes.

THE MYSTIC — ***F. St. Mars***
A fox, a polecat and corn-crakes.

THE RIGHT HAND OF SIDI DOWHDI — ***George E. Holt***
Swift vengeance in Morocco.



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Everybody's Magazine

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